

Frequently asked questions about recognition to operate in the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF)

The questions presented in this document have been raised by organisations currently applying or considering applying for recognition to operate in the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF). They have been grouped under the following headings for ease of reference:

1. Questions in relation to the recognition process
2. Questions in relation to the general requirements for all organisations operating in the QCF
3. Questions in relation to the requirements for organisations that develop and submit units
4. Questions in relation to the requirements for organisations develop rules of combination
5. Questions in relation to the requirements for awarding organisations operating in the QCF

1. Questions in relation to the recognition process

1.1	Q	Is there a standard titling convention for banking documents submitted as part of the QCF recognition process?
	A	<p>There is no standard titling convention for the banking documents submitted as part of the recognition process.</p> <p>You do need to ensure that the documents submitted as as supporting evidence for your recognition application is clearly titled. You should also indicate where in the documentation the evidence of compliance is located by reference to document title, page number and paragraph.</p>
1.2	Q	Do banking documents have to be individual documents or may one document satisfy the requirement for more than one section of the recognition application form?
	A	It is possible for one document to satisfy several requirements of the Regulatory arrangements for the QCF. Please make sure that you clearly indicate where this is the case by cross referencing the different pages and paragraphs of the submitted document to the relevant requirements of the Regulatory arrangements.
1.3	Q	Does 5 day accreditation apply to all organisations within the QCF and is it sector specific?
	A	All QCF submissions are made to WBA through the 5-day route. Awarding organisations that have not completed the 5-day application process (NQF qualifications) are therefore required to submit 5-day banking documents with their QCF supplementary recognition applications.

1.4	Q	On the supplementary recognition application form is explanatory text required or just cross referencing to attachments?
	A	The supplementary recognition form indicates what is required for each section. Some sections ask for banking documents to be submitted. You are usually asked to provide your procedures or processes. It is helpful if you can give some explanatory text to put your documents and cross referencing into context, this will enable the reviewer to access the evidence that you are submitting more easily.
1.5	Q	Can awarding organisations have a copy of the banking documents grid to ensure that they provide the correct evidence in support of their application?
	A	This grid is no longer being used. You will find a list of the banking and additional documents that you need to supply in Sections 1 and 2 of the supplementary application form.
1.6	Q	What are the terms and conditions for the QCF and where can I find them?
	A	The terms and conditions of recognition to operate in the QCF apply to all organisations that are recognised to operate in the QCF. They can be downloaded from the Ofqual website here .
1.7	Q	Can overseas organisations become recognised to operate in the QCF?
	A	Yes an overseas organisation can be recognised to operate in the QCF, provided that they have offices and an identified market in England, Wales or Northern Ireland, An overseas organisation will also have to demonstrate compliance with paragraph 5.19(a) of the Regulatory arrangements and that their credit and qualification certificates state that they are only recognised in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.
1.8	Q	On the supplementary recognition application form, what are the implications of signing up to the design specifications of the QCF?
	A	The design specifications of the QCF underpin the operation of the framework. They set out the template requirements for units, rules of combination and qualifications. All organisations wishing to operate in the QCF must agree to comply with the requirements of section 1 of the Regulatory arrangements for the QCF .
1.9	Q	What would be deemed suitable evidence of training and guidance to meet the requirements of paragraphs 4.1(b), 5.2(b), 3.1(c) of the Regulatory arrangements for the QCF?
	A	Evidence for these requirements should demonstrate that staff have access to training, either internally or externally, on the regulatory requirements and

		<p>practical implications of the implementation of the QCF, as well as training aimed at maintaining and developing relevant expertise, for example on assessment methods.</p> <p>An organisation may have an internal training plan which can be submitted together with calendar of training events and details of specific training activities in the form of an agenda or training materials,. Evidence of staff attendance on external training events could also be submitted. This could take the form of an agenda for the training event, specific training materials distributed, or materials produced following a training event intended to circulate/cascade knowledge throughout the organisation.</p> <p>It is important to note that these requirements relate to staff and associates involved in the delivery of particular regulated functions – i.e. unit development, rule of combination development etc.</p>
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1.10	Q	What is deemed sufficient evidence to meet 2.14 in the Regulatory arrangements for the QCF?
	A	<p>Paragraph 2.14 relates to the collection and use of data in relation to a recognised organisation's compliance with the diversity and equality requirements for the QCF. In order to demonstrate that they meet the requirements of this paragraph, organisations need to describe the procedures they have in place to collect data in relation to diversity and equality requirements, and to show how the data gathered is used to monitor and evaluate their compliance.</p> <p>It is important to note that the requirements of Section 2 of the Regulatory arrangements apply to all recognised organisations and across all regulatory functions. Organisations therefore need to demonstrate how these requirements are met in relation to each regulatory function that they undertake – i.e. Unit Development, Rule of Combination Development, Design and Delivery of Assessment etc.</p>

2. Questions in relation to the general requirements for all organisations operating in the QCF

2.1	Q	If an organisation that is recognised to operate in the QCF but does not submit units, rules of combination or qualification proposals. How long will it be before they are "de-recognised"?
	A	The regulators expect recognised organisations to submit units, rules of combination or qualifications proposals within a reasonable time, normally six months to a year. If that does not happen, the organisation will be contacted to discuss its plans. If it has no plans to submit units to the databank or qualification proposals for recognition, the regulators can withdraw recognition.
2.2	Q	How do you get access to see what is in the QCF?
	A	All qualifications accredited on to the QCF can be viewed on the National Database of Accredited Qualifications (NDAQ), all units that form part of accredited qualifications can also be viewed on this website. Units submitted to the databank that have not yet been included in an accredited qualification can only be viewed via WBA. An organisation must be approved by the regulators to operate in the QCF in order to have access to this feature of WBA.
2.3	Q	What functions are awarding organisations at different stages of recognition allowed to undertake in the QCF?
	A	<p>Currently there are a number of organisations operating in the QCF as a legacy of the test and trials and piloting arrangements for the QCF. In order to achieve full recognition to operate in the QCF these organisations will need to complete the supplementary recognition process for the QCF.</p> <p>The implications of full recognition to operate in the QCF were set out in the regulators' letter on the subject of accreditation end dates sent in August 2009, a copy of the letter can be downloaded from the Ofqual website at: http://www.ofqual.gov.uk/2043.aspx</p>
2.4	Q	What are the IT requirements for operating in the QCF?
	A	<p>Units and Rules of Combination are submitted to the QCF via the Web Based Accreditation (WBA) system. WBA is an online system can be accessed from any internet browser. Access is restricted to organisations that are recognised by the regulators.</p> <p>Paragraph 5.11 of the Regulatory arrangements for the QCF stipulates that</p>

	<p>awarding organisations must have arrangements in place: to obtain on behalf of its learners a unique learner number and a learner record, and to use access to the learner record to ensure that opportunities for credit transfer and exemption are maximised</p> <p>Paragraphs 5.12(d) and 5.13(e) state that awarding organisations must also have procedures in place to ensure that credit and qualification awards are accurately recorder, amended and, if necessary, withdrawn in a timely manner in their learner record.</p> <p>Further information about ULN and the Learner Record can be obtained from the MIAP website or by emailing qcfservicedesk@lsc.gov.uk.</p>
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3. Questions in relation to the requirements for organisations that develop and submit units

3.1	Q	How should credit value and unit levels be determined, As an inclusive part of the Unit Development Process, or as a bolt on after the Unit has been developed?
	A	Credit values and unit levelling should be an integral part of the unit development process. Paragraph 3.2(d) of the Regulatory arrangements for the QCF requires organisation to have procedures in place to ensure that the levels and credit values of units are determined accurately and consistently as part of the development process.

3.2	Q	Is there any guidance on how to determine levels and credit values for units?
	A	<p>Paragraphs 1.6 and 1.7 together with Annex E of the Regulatory arrangements for the QCF specify the minimum requirements for the level and credit value of units. The Regulatory arrangements do not prescribe the processes for how organisations should ensure these requirements are met.</p> <p>The Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency (QCDA) has produced guidance for writing units for the QCF that includes useful information on how level and credit value should be determined, this guidance can be accessed through the QCF readiness webpage.</p>

3.3	Q	How should units from the National Qualifications Framework (NQF), or units based on National Occupational Standards (NOS) be brought into the QCF?
	A	<p>Any unit/qualification submitted to the QCF must meet the requirements of the Regulatory arrangements for the QCF.</p> <p>Therefore units currently featured in qualifications on the NQF will need to be redeveloped to meet the requirements of the QCF.</p> <p>The Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency (QCDA) has produced guidance for writing units that meet the requirements of the design specification of the QCF. This guidance includes sections on how to write competency based units using NOS with reference to practical examples. This guidance can be accessed through the QCF readiness webpage.</p>

3.4	Q	Who is responsible for the quality assurance of units in the QCF which are shared?
	A	The owner of the unit is responsible for the quality assurance of the units that it

		<p>develops and submits to the unit databank, hence the need for organisations that submit units to have in place robust and auditable procedures for unit development and sign off.</p> <p>However, it should be noted that it is awarding organisations that have responsibility for the quality assurance of the delivery of assessment of all units included in the qualifications that they offer. Hence the requirement for awarding organisations to have in place comprehensive procedures for the design, development and delivery of assessment.</p>
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3.5	Q	How are units updated – can end dates be extended or does a new unit have to be submitted each time.
	A	<p>The expiry date for a unit can be amended via the Web Based Accreditation (WBA) system by the unit owner. This process requires the organisation that owns the unit to review the unit and to demonstrate that the unit continues to be fit for purpose.</p> <p>If, following the review, the unit owner determines that the unit requires updating, a new unit will need to be developed and submitted to replace the old unit.</p>

3.6	Q	Who has the responsibility for ensuring that all organisations that use a unit are aware of things like end dates, amendments etc?
	A	<p>The web based accreditation system does not allow awarding organisations to submit rules of combination that include a unit with an expiry date that is earlier than the end date of the qualification in question. As set out in paragraph 1.13 of the QCF arrangements, once a unit is included in an accredited qualification, only its expiry date can be amended. However, such an amendment cannot result in the withdrawal of a unit if it is included in an accredited qualification.</p>

3.7	Q	Clearer guidance is required regarding the when and how of submitting individual units.
	A	<p>Units can be submitted, amended and extended at any time via the Web Based Accreditation (WBA) system.</p> <p>WBA features a unit search facility that can be used to locate specific units. Any unit included in an accredited qualification can also be located by using the unit search facility on the National Database of Accredited Qualifications (NDAQ).</p>

3.8	Q	What happens if a unit is submitted to the database without endorsement by a Sector Skills Council – will this only be picked up at post-submission monitoring?
	A	<p>Paragraph 3.2 (b) of the Regulatory arrangements for the QCF requires unit submitting organisations when developing units to have procedures in place to "use provision planning tools wherever these exist, or use market research, labour market intelligence or evidence of learner demand, individual or social benefit where appropriate"</p> <p>The unit template on WBA requires organisations to provide an overview of the purpose and aim of a unit.</p>

		<p>There is no specific requirement for units submitted to the unit databank to be endorsed or approved of by an SSC/B; although paragraph 6.2(b) of the Regulatory arrangements for the QCF states that qualification proposals submitted for accreditation must be 'approved of' by an SSC where the qualification falls within an SSC footprint. Recognised organisations should bear this in mind when developing and submitting units.</p> <p>However, it should be noted that the qualifications regulators will always reserve the right to accredit a qualification that is not supported or 'approved' of by an SSC where there is sufficient evidence to justify such a decision.</p>
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3.9	Q	What are the safeguards that guarantee that units will not populate the database that do not have SSC/B endorsement?
	A	As outlined above, there is no requirement for all units submitted to the unit databank to be 'approved of' by an SSC/B. However, it is good practice for a unit submitter to engage with all interested parties early in the development phase.

3.10	Q	Within a small organisation there may possibly be the same person writing the units as well as signing off them. Is that okay?
	A	As part of the application process for QCF recognition organisations are asked to submit their procedures for unit development. These procedures must demonstrate how the organisation meets all the requirements of paragraph 3.2 of the Regulatory arrangements. It is difficult to see how this process could be undertaken by one person from start to finish whilst also incorporating procedures to ensure that the level and credit value of units are determined accurately and consistently and that the units are subject to a robust and meaningful review and sign off procedure.

3.11	Q	Is it possible to refer to other documentation in the additional information section of the QCF unit template?
	A	Yes, provided that the document referred to is freely accessible and that a clear indication is given for where the most up to date can be located.

3.12	Q	If a unit to be submitted to the unit databank has already been used in the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) can it be assumed that the QCF credit value will be the same as the SCQF credit value?
	A	No. The SCQF is not a unit based framework in the same way as the QCF. Consequently the process by which the credit rating of a qualification in the SCQF is arrived at is different to the process for determining the credit value of a unit in the QCF. The design specifications for the QCF make it clear that the credit value of a unit must be determined as an integral part of its development, whereas in the SCQF the credit rating of a qualification and its components is determined by way of a process that is separate from its development.

3.13	Q	When is support for a unit required from a Sector Skills Council(SSC)?
	A	See answer to question 30 above. There is no requirement for units to be endorsed by an SSC/SSB prior to submission to the QCF databank but it is good practice for a unit submitter to engage with all interested parties early in the development phase.

3.14	Q	In the absence of an SSC, from whom might support for a unit be required?
	A	There is no specific requirement for units submitted to the unit databank to be endorsed or approved of by an SSC/B; although paragraph 6.2(b) of the Regulatory arrangements for the QCF states that qualification proposals submitted for accreditation must be 'approved of' by an SSC where the qualification falls within an SSC footprint. Recognised organisations should bear this in mind when developing and submitting units.

3.15	Q	Who will take responsibility for a unit if the unit-submitting organisation ceases to exist?
	A	<p>The Regulatory arrangements require recognised organisations to have in place sufficient resources to support current and future demands for their services.</p> <p>If a unit is not included in a unit it can be withdrawn from the databank at any time.</p> <p>Otherwise, in the event that a unit submitting organisation ceased operating the regulators would take steps to ensure that appropriate arrangements are put in place to safeguard the interest of learners and stakeholders. For example, it may be that the ownership of the units could be transferred to other recognised organisations.</p>

3.16	Q	How can a unit be amended immediately (for example to match changes imposed by a sector regulator)?
	A	Units can be submitted, amended and extended at any time via WBA. These functions can be found on the in 'Create QCF Units' or 'Search QCF units' pages of WBA.

3.17	Q	Who will be responsible for alerting all of the awarding organisations that use a unit, if the unit-submitting organisation amends the unit, or deletes the unit?
	A	<p>Once a unit is included in a rule of combination it becomes 'live' and the only feature of a unit that can be amended is its expiry date. However a unit cannot be withdrawn by its owner if it is included in an accredited qualification. Therefore the expiry date of a 'live' unit can only be amended if this does not affect the end date of the qualification(s) in which that unit is included.</p> <p>If a recognised organisation wishes to redevelop or update a unit, it will need to submit a new unit to the databank that will be allocated a new unit number. Currently, there is no facility to notify awarding organisations that are using a</p>

		particular unit, if the unit owner submits an updated version of the same unit. However, when a qualification is reviewed by the organisation that owns it, it should have procedures in place to interrogate the unit databank in order to establish whether there are other, more suitable units available.
3.18	Q	What will happen if the regulators judge, during an audit, that a unit being used in qualifications is faulty or has an inappropriate credit value or level?
	A	Where recognised organisations are found not to be meeting the requirements of the Regulatory arrangements the regulators will take appropriate measures to ensure that the organisations in question take action to address the situation. This could include requiring the organisation to amend, replace or withdraw a unit within agreed timelines.

4. Questions in relation to the requirements for organisations develop rules of combination

4.1	Q	If a rule of combination developer wishes to use a shared unit that is owned by another organisation, is there a requirement to notify the unit owner?
	A	No, any unit in the databank designated as shared can be included in a rule of combination. By designating a unit as shared the owner of the unit signals their agreement for the unit to be included in any rule of combination. When viewing units in the unit databank or on the National Database of Accredited Qualifications (NDAQ) it is possible to see a list of qualifications in which the unit is featured.
4.2	Q	The design specifications for the QCF state that credits are transferable between different qualifications and awarding organisations, subject to the rules of combination. This could cause confusion as to which credits can be transferred.
	A	Each unit has a unique number – credit is associated to this number. Credit awarded for the successful completion of a unit can be counted towards a qualification in which that unit features, provided that the rule of combination does not include a time limit or stipulate that a particular combination of units is barred as set out in paragraphs 1.24 (e) and (i) of the Regulatory arrangements for the QCF.
4.3	Q	Is it possible for an awarding organisation to include a mandatory or optional unit within its rules of combination, if it is not itself entitled to award credit for the unit?
	A	<p>No, in order for an awarding organisation to offer a unit that it does not own as part of its qualification, the owner of the unit must either have designated the unit as shared or indicated that the awarding organisation in question was authorised to use it.</p> <p>If an awarding organisation wishes to give learners the opportunity to count credit from a restricted unit submitted by another organisation towards its own qualification, it can use the rule of combination to specify "equivalent units", as set out in paragraph 1.24(g) of the Regulatory arrangements.</p> <p>The Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency (QCDA) has produced guidance on credits from equivalent units. This guidance can be accessed through the QCF readiness webpage.</p>

5. Questions in relation to the requirements for awarding organisations operating in the QCF

5.1	Q	Do the requirements for Centre Recognition, set out in paragraph 5.11 of the Regulatory arrangements for the QCF, only apply to teaching centres?
	A	<p>For the most part the requirements set out in paragraph 5.11 of the arrangements are new to the QCF. They set out the necessary arrangements, systems and resources that awarding organisations and/or their centres must have in place to support the operation of the QCF, including the accumulation and transfer of credit, recording of exemptions, obtaining and using unique learner numbers (ULN) etc.</p> <p>As indicated in the footnote to this paragraph these requirements must be met by awarding organisations and/or their centres. How an organisation chooses to meet these requirements will depend on its model for delivering assessment. For example, it will depend on the way in which an awarding organisation registers learners for a qualification.</p> <p>It is important to note that in order to successfully complete the QCF recognition process and awarding organisation will need to demonstrate how it meets the requirements set out in paragraph 5.11 of the QCF arrangements.</p>

5.2	Q	In relation to graded qualifications, what is the definition of "components of a qualification" mentioned in the Regulatory arrangements for the QCF?
	A	<p>The use of the term 'components' relation to grading arrangements in the QCF is deliberate (paragraphs 1.28 – 1.30, and 5.4 of the Regulatory arrangements). Information about grading cannot be included in the QCF unit template, instead this information is submitted at the point of accreditation as part of a qualification proposal.</p> <p>In the QCF, information about grading is a characteristic of qualifications and is separate to the unit template. The use of the term 'component' is intended to highlight this aspect of the QCF design specifications.</p>

5.3	Q	Is it possible to obtain a Unique Learner Number (ULN) for learners undertaking a qualification overseas?
	A	<p>At present the use of unique learner numbers is limited to learners in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. For more information in relation to ULN please contact the LSC on gcf servicedesk@lsc.gov.uk or alternatively visit the MIAP website.</p>

5.4	Q	If awarding organisations are issuing certificates to learners outside of England, Wales and Northern Ireland, do they have to state anything about where the certificates are recognised or accredited?
	A	Paragraph 5.19 of the Regulatory arrangements for the QCF states that awarding organisations need to inform their clients that the regulators' logos on the certificate indicate that the qualification is accredited only for England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

5.5	Q	Will the use of the regulatory logos be for qualifications accredited on the QCF or for organisations recognised to operate in the QCF?
	A	At present the regulators' logos can only be used for certification purposes. The question of whether or not the use of these logos will be expanded will be looked at as part of the regulators' review of their activity and processes as part of the preparations for implementing the provision of the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning bill currently before parliament.

5.6	Q	What is now expected of Awarding Organisations with respect to learner records and opportunities for credit transfer and exemption?
	A	<p>One of the key aims of the QCF is to provide learners with opportunities for credit transfer and exemption, this is reflected in the design specifications for rules of combination set out in paragraph 2.14 of the Regulatory arrangements for the QCF. Paragraph 4.3(d) sets out the requirement for organisations developing rules of combination to ensure that opportunities for credit accumulation and transfer (CAT) and exemption are maximised.</p> <p>Paragraphs 5.11(b) and (e) state that an awarding organisation must have procedures in place to ensure that it or its centres can " ... support the assessment of units and the award, accumulation and transfer of credits and, where necessary the recording of exemptions" and can access the "learner record to ensure that opportunities for credit transfer and exemptions are maximised".</p> <p>In relation to the learner record, the current expectation is that awarding organisations have put in place the necessary arrangements to ensure that they and/or their centres can make use of the achievement data held on learner's records to support credit transfer, for example by updating their centre recognition requirements.</p> <p>Further information about ULN and the Learner Record can be obtained from the MIAP website or by emailing qcfservicedesk@isc.gov.uk.</p>

5.7	Q	How will learner records and awarding of certificates sit together?
	A	The learner record is the cumulative record of a learner's achievement in the QCF. Awarding organisations must have procedures in place to ensure that awards of credits and qualifications are "recorded, amended and, if necessary withdrawn in

		<p>a timely manner in the learner record".</p> <p>Further information about ULN and the Learner Record can be obtained from the MIAP website or by emailing qcf servicedesk@lsc.gov.uk.</p> <p>Credit certificates are issued to learners for completing units and qualification certificates are awarded to learners that have accumulated the necessary credit specified by a particular rule of combination.</p>
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5.8	Q	What is a reasonable fee for awarding credit certificates on demand?
	A	<p>Paragraph 5.13 of the Regulatory arrangements for the QCF states that credit certificates must be issued wherever these are demanded by learners. However, the arrangements do not set out any specific requirements in relation to the fees that may be charged for issuing credit certificates.</p> <p>An awarding organisation need to be able to demonstrate that any such fees are not disproportionate to the cost of producing a certificate and that they do not present an unreasonable obstacle for a learner to obtain a record of their achievement.</p>

5.9	Q	What constitutes a credit certificate, does it have to be paper or can it be electronic?
	A	Credit certificates must meet the design requirements set out in Annex C of the Regulatory arrangements for the QCF. All credit and qualification certificates must be printed.

5.10	Q	What about National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) in the QCF (and other qualification types?)
	A	There are at present no plans to introduce any qualification types into the QCF. The regulators have published clarifications on the use of the term 'NVQ' in qualification titles. These documents can be downloaded from the Ofqual website .

5.11	Q	Are awarding organisations required to put in place arrangements for the recognition of prior learning (RPL) for short courses such as 2 day coaching courses?
	A	Paragraph 5.6h of the Regulatory arrangements for the QCF states that "awarding organisations must have in place the necessary systems and procedures and resources to ensure (...) achievement is recognised through the recognition of prior learning (RPL) <i>where this is appropriate</i> ." The requirement for awarding organisations is therefore to have in place a process whereby the appropriateness of providing arrangements for RPL can be determined and recorded, this will necessarily vary depending on the nature of the qualification and the delivery model for the assessment.