

VQ WATCH

2009/1

May 2009

A catch up on recent developments in vocational qualifications

Welcome to the first edition of VQ Watch. This is intended to update you on developments in the QCF and other vocational areas. There will be around six editions a year. This first issue includes updates on FLT, Apprenticeships, QCF, Train to Gain, BTECs and VQ day.

FLT - update guidance due out at the end of the month

The Foundation Learning Tier (FLT) provides clear routes, called progression pathways, for young people and adults (age 14 and over) working below level 2 to achieve combinations of qualifications at entry level and level 1 that will prepare them for Level 2 and beyond.

QIA has been working with a range of post 16 providers, identified through the LSC, to model and develop their existing provision at Entry and Level 1 in preparation for the wider scale introduction of Progression Pathways in 2009 and 2010. The National Youth Agency and Asdan are researching ways in which basic, non-formal learning can be brought within the accreditation framework. QCA will be publishing updated guidance on the FLT imminently. In the meanwhile all you ever wanted to know about the FLT, including: what the competition are offering; pathway development and the research undertaken by National Youth Agency and Asdan; market share, by volume and pricing can be found here:

<http://www.excellencegateway.org.uk/FLT>

Apprenticeships

The new National Apprenticeship Service became operational at the beginning of April, at the same time consultation continues on the Apprenticeships' structures in England. This closes on 29th May 2009. It seeks views on:

- whether level 2 functional skills should be compulsory
- whether ICT should be compulsory.
- whether EER should be embedded, separately accredited, and defined by each SSC.
- how PLTS should be embedded
- whether the lack of a national requirement for assessment for PLTS is an issue
- whether the minimum off-workstation time is proposed as 250 hours, consistent across all Apprenticeships is the correct way forward
- whether minimum off-workstation time should be higher for Advanced Apprenticeships (level 3)
- whether to, and how to, account for prior learning
- the strengthening of the entry requirements and progression routes

Subject to the passage of the Bill, all Apprenticeships are to be compliant by March 2011.

You can access the consultation:

http://www.dius.gov.uk/~media/publications/005633_SASE_consultation_doc

Edexcel will be submitting a response.

QCF IT - new, improved version!

The web based accreditation (WBA) system is the system whereby Awarding Organisations/Unit Submitting Bodies submit units onto the QCF for accreditation. The new release will enable Awarding Organisations/Unit Submitting Bodies to:

- Search for existing QCF units;
- Create new QCF units;
- Link to existing QCF units;
- Amend and extend existing QCF units;
- Delete and withdraw existing QCF units;
- Bulk upload QCF units.

Awarding Organisations/Unit Submitting Bodies will now have the facility to create and submit units directly to the QCF unit database without the need for them to be linked directly to a WBA proposal. Should the regulator request a change or amendment, this may be done by the unit databank.

The new QCF unit bulk upload facility will enable unit owners to upload their units in bulk to the databank for subsequent use within QCF proposals. As the bulk upload feature submits the units directly into the unit databank, the system will only accept units passing the automatic validation rules, otherwise the units or the file will be rejected. A subsequent release is planned. Any technical errors should be reported to error.wba@qca.org.uk

LSC Service layer up-date

Edexcel recently had a positive meeting with the LSC to discuss LSC's work on the QCF service layer. We're interested in the business processes associated with the Service Layer and will fully engage with it, once we are confident that the system will be of benefit to us and our customers.

The interim/transition solution feeds into the strategic solution. Three releases are scheduled of the transitional solution:

- Release 1 happened 24.4.09 - access available to ABs via a simple interface
- Release 2 due 30.6.09 – API interface for data upload (web- based) and mediated learner access
- Release 3 due 30.9.09 - enhanced data validation; quicker CT queries; functionality re routes to achievement; R3 still open to further definition (current queries how to deal with withdrawals, amendments and notifications to ABs)
- Strategic solution due August 2010

Barriers to engagement include: confidence in learner demand, ULN and UKPRN; IT resourcing for immediate development requirements; more information about the API; mapping of business processes with LSC and other ABs (LSC have developed draft business processes which can be shared with ABs in workshops).

LSC - accessing the Learning Aims Database

The Learning Aim Database (LAD) contains information about all LSC-recognised learning aims offered by providers who return individualised learner record (ILR) data to the Council. It includes learning aim information required to complete ILR data returns, as well as funding and statistical data. The collection of information within the LAD is the responsibility of the Data Service. The LAD is available online via the LSC [provider extranet LAD page](#).

There are options to search the current database or download the database (current and archived versions, in various formats). The online LAD and the latest download represent the most current

data. The LAD holds data for three teaching years. These are currently 2006/07, 2007/08 and 2008/09

The last word on funding lies with the LSC. Centres should be in contact with their LSC in relation to the planning and funding of their provision.

T2G and 25+ Apprenticeships - Managing Demand

Uptake of both Train to Gain and 25+ Apprenticeships have exceeded expectations (and budgets). This has been caused, on the one hand by the government's targeting and promotion of these areas and on the other hand by a lack of planning, more people staying on in education than expected.

The Budget:

- announced further support through extra training places for 18-24 year olds
- re-confirmed the Government's commitment to Leitch
- confirmed that of the 35,000 additional apprenticeships announced in January this year, 21,000 of these will be in the public sector
- provided investment totalling £59m through the Economic Challenge Investment Fund
- increased total Train to Gain funding to £925m in 2009-10 and over £1 billion by 2010-11.

 [LSC stakeholder briefing](#) (48k)

SSCs - supporting (NVQ)s

NVQs in QCF.

There is an on-going fight to maintain NVQs as a qualification type in the QCF, rather than as just quasi type, denoted by '(NVQ)' at the end of the qualification title. Ofqual/QCA have agreed to the identification of a qualification as an NVQ, but only as a brand, not as a type. They must be branded in accordance with the NVQ operating rules (August 2008), but in reality this only means that the SSC agrees to the qualification being called an NVQ. NVQs will not have qualification criteria and there will be no common characteristics of qualifications branded NVQs.

The letter from Lord Young, the Skills Minister, does not present a strong indication that 'types' will re-emerge in the QCF, referring, as he does to brands:

"...NVQs ... should remain a distinctive brand of qualification ... I would not want to see them disappear through some unintended consequence of Government policy. ...the brand might be reinforced by additional requirements about the quality assurance ... reflected in a regulatory Code ... I have no problems, in principle, with such requirements being defined."

Part A - Edexcel Awarding Organisation accreditation in QCF

Edexcel are piloting the application to become an Awarding Organisation in the QCF. We decided to do this as it gives us an opportunity to review our policies and procedures and up-date them accordingly. Other awarding bodies (recognised in the NQF) are applying for an extension to be recognised in the QCF, a less onerous process. We submitted our application in March and have received detailed feedback.

Lots of detail is required with careful cross referencing to supporting documents. As Edexcel cover a wide range of sectors and qualifications, then we need to supply a lot of information. The biggest problem is trying to supply procedures for which the regulator has yet to define, eg ULNs

and transfer of credit. However, in time this won't be a problem. We need to have achieved our accreditation in order to be able to award our first QCF qualifications when learners demand.

BTEC national suites - accreditation

The BTEC First and BTEC National suites have been revised and were submitted to QCA at the beginning of April. QCA are identifying key areas for scrutiny prior to accreditation by Ofqual. The emphasis is on: "Scrutinising the content of units (through sampling), focusing on units that have been identified as appropriate to meet Diploma ASL requirements", as well as "a holistic review of the BTEC suite of qualifications in the Construction." The Construction suite is being used as a sample suite. QCA have fed back immediate concerns and issues and will complete their scrutiny by 6th May for a report to be prepared for Ofqual.

Fullness - level 2 and level 3

The new interim level 2 'full' definition has been set at 13 credits, with flexibility built in for SSCs who want to increase or decrease the size. The new interim level 3 'full' definition has been proposed as being 25-70 credits, again, with flexibility built in for SSCs who want to increase or decrease the size. Confirmation from DIUS, is expected shortly.

Edexcel will have to work closely with SSCs to develop new QCF 'full' level 2 and 3 qualifications according to SSC requirements, which maybe different within each sector, within each SSC. SSCs are responsible for engaging with us when developing their definition, and communicating with us the development of their definition.

VQ Day - 24th June

VQ Day 2009 is taking place on Wednesday 24 June at Hackney Community College. It celebrates the success of those who have taken vocational qualifications and those who have helped them to achieve. The day is being led by education foundation, Edge. Gordon Marsden MP, Siôn Simon, Further Education Minister for the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills and Garry Hawkes, President of Edge, Sophie Kelly, a BTEC learner were amongst the speakers at the launch event in March. An Early Day Motion (EDM) supporting Vocational Qualifications Day has been tabled in the House of Commons and has attracted support from both sides of the House.

To join the roll call for instant recognition of your VQ go to the VQ Day home page:
<http://www.vqday.org.uk/>

Support packs from QCF - version 3 out now!

These are downloadable from the web or available from QCA. www.qca.org.uk
83 Picadilly, London. W1J 8QA. Tel 020 7509 5556
QCA reference: QCA/08/3989 ISBN: 978-1-84721-879-7

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