

After the QCF: A New Qualifications Framework

Decisions on Conditions and Guidance for the Regulated Qualifications Framework (RQF)



In March 2015 we published a consultation about the rules and guidance we proposed to put in place when we withdraw the Regulatory Arrangements for the Qualifications and Credit Framework (the QCF rules).

The consultation set out the draft Conditions, requirements, guidance and criteria which would apply to all qualifications, general and vocational, when the QCF rules are withdrawn.

We reviewed the responses to our consultation and our decisions have been informed by those responses. We have decided to introduce a simple, descriptive framework, the Regulated Qualifications Framework (RQF) to replace the QCF (and the NQF – National Qualifications Framework). The RQF will help people understand better how qualifications relate to each other, by setting consistent measures of size (how long, typically, a qualification takes to study and be assessed for) and level of difficulty. The RQF will include all qualifications we regulate. Unlike the QCF, it does not set qualification design rules. Our General Conditions of Recognition already set a wide range of requirements that regulated qualifications must meet in order to be valid and fit for purpose.

The remainder of this document sets out the detail of our decisions and why we took them. We are publishing an analysis of the responses alongside this document.¹

Qualification levels

We proposed a new Condition which required that:

- all qualifications should have a level;

www.gov.uk/government/consultations/after-the-qcf-a-new-qualifications-framework

- the level of a qualification should be kept under review; and
- the level of a qualification should be revised only through a managed process.

There was clear support for our proposals about level. Some respondents said they thought that it should not be possible to change the level of a qualification and where a problem was identified with the level of a qualification, the qualification should be withdrawn.

We have decided to confirm our proposals about qualification levels. In response to feedback, we have also given awarding organisations which need to change the level of a qualification the option to either withdraw the qualification, following the withdrawal process, or to change the level under a planned process.

Level requirements

In our consultation, we proposed that awarding organisations should use level descriptors to assign the most appropriate level to the qualification. We set out draft level descriptors for Entry 1–3 and Levels 1–8 in the knowledge and skills categories and which applied to general and vocational qualifications.

Some respondents suggested that the level descriptors should also include a category for autonomy and accountability.

We considered whether to add this category but given the difficulty associated with aligning knowledge and/or skills with autonomy and accountability in some job roles, we have decided to confirm our original proposal and introduce level descriptors only in the knowledge and skills categories.

This will not prevent awarding organisations from assessing autonomy and accountability in their qualifications but this should not be factored into a determination of level.

Some respondents noticed that the draft level descriptor for Level 3 did not include problem-solving skills. This mistake has been corrected.

Some respondents suggested that it would be helpful to have summary statements to accompany the level descriptors. These would describe what the typical holder of a qualification at the level would know and be able to do. While we see the benefit of such statements in some circumstances, the new level descriptors are designed to support a framework for all regulated qualifications, general and vocational. There is a balance to be struck between producing a summary statement which is sufficiently detailed to be meaningful while not being overly prescriptive or specific to particular roles. We have therefore decided not to include summary statements.

Qualification size

In the consultation we proposed a new Condition which required all qualifications to be assigned a measure of size, expressed in terms of Total Qualification Time (TQT) and made up of:

- Guided Learning Hours (GLH);
- Directed Learning Hours; and
- Invigilated Assessment Hours.

Respondents to the consultation said they thought this was overly complicated and there was no clear rationale for requiring Directed Learning Hours and Invigilated Assessment Hours to be calculated and shown for every qualification.

We agreed with those respondents and have amended the new Condition so that all qualifications are now required to have a measure of size, expressed in terms of TQT and GLH only. The figure for GLH should form part of TQT.

As a result of this change we have also made changes to the requirements, guidance and criteria about allocating and describing the size of a qualification. These have been simplified to reflect the requirement that the size of qualifications needs to be expressed only through TQT and GLH.

Qualification specifications

Respondents agreed with our proposals that the specification for a qualification should include:

- the number of hours for TQT and each element of it;
- any credit value; and
- the level of the qualification.

They also agreed that the specification for a qualification should be promptly amended if there was any change to the TQT, level or credit value. We have decided to confirm our proposals about specifications.

Titling

Respondents to the consultation raised no objections to our proposal that the title of a qualification should be changed if an awarding organisation makes any change to the level of a qualification.

A number of respondents said that when the QCF rules are withdrawn, they would like to include the term “Regulated” or the name of the new framework in the title of their qualification to indicate that the qualification is regulated by us. There is nothing to prevent an awarding organisation from using the term “Regulated” or “Regulated Qualifications Framework” or RQF in the title of its qualifications as long as this is not misleading.

Some respondents argued that removing the term “QCF” from the title of their qualifications by 31st December 2017 would be unnecessarily burdensome. We reviewed this proposal and weighed the regulatory burden against the possible confusion caused by continuing to use a term which will gradually cease to be used and known. We think that the timeframe proposed is reasonable and as this issue is covered in guidance, an awarding organisation could make a case for using the term beyond 31st December 2017. It will still be possible for students to be awarded qualifications with the term QCF in the title after 31st December 2017 where the student started the qualification before that date. We have decided to confirm our proposals about titling.

We said in the consultation that at the same time as we withdraw the QCF, we will also withdraw the regulatory framework which underpins NVQs. It will continue to be possible for qualifications to be described as NVQs where they are based on recognised occupational standards, work-based and/or simulated work-based assessment and where they confer occupational competence. Some respondents questioned the proposed withdrawal of the NVQ Code of Practice and the rest of the NVQ regulatory framework. We reviewed this proposal and believe that our General Conditions are sufficient to provide for effective regulation of these qualifications. There is nothing to prevent awarding organisations and others from continuing to adhere to the NVQ Code of Practice and the rest of the NVQ framework but these will not form part of our own regulatory requirements. We confirm our original proposal about NVQs.

Recognition of prior learning

We proposed that awarding organisations which wanted to allow the recognition of prior learning (RPL) should be required to have and publish an RPL policy. Respondents agreed with this proposal and so we confirmed our decision without further change.

Some respondents to our consultation suggested that the role of centres in deciding whether a student should be granted RPL should be clear. We agree with this and have amended the Guidance which supports the Condition about RPL to reflect this.

Credit

We proposed to introduce a new Condition which said that if an awarding organisation chose to attribute credit it could do so either to a qualification or to a component of a qualification and that credit should be calculated by dividing TQT by 10. We also proposed that if an awarding organisation reviewed a qualification's TQT, it should, if appropriate, also review its credit value.

Issues raised by respondents about this focused on the way in which we described the size of qualifications (see above) and not about the formula for calculating credit. We have confirmed our proposals about credit.

Next steps

- 1st October 2015 – QCF rules are withdrawn, Conditions about level, titling, RPL and credit come into force;
- We will write to awarding organisations to notify them when the Condition about the size of qualifications will come into force;
- 31st December 2017 – date by which all qualifications should be assigned a Total Qualification Time.

Further information

We have published the following documents:

- revised *General Conditions of Recognition*;²
- revised *Guidance to the General Conditions of Recognition*;³
- *Total Qualification Time Criteria*;⁴
- *Qualification and Component Levels*;⁵
- *Criteria for determining whether a qualification is relevant for the purposes of the Education and Skills Act 2008*.⁶

² www.gov.uk/government/publications/general-conditions-of-recognition

³ www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-to-the-general-conditions-of-recognition

⁴ www.gov.uk/government/publications/total-qualification-time-criteria

⁵ www.gov.uk/government/publications/qualification-and-component-levels

⁶ www.gov.uk/government/publications/criteria-for-determining-whether-a-qualification-is-relevant-for-the-purposes-of-the-education-and-skills-act-2008