

ANALYSIS OF CONSULTATION RESPONSES

Responses on statutory guidance for Condition F1

Guidance on the publication of qualification fee
information

ofqual

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Introduction

Following a joint consultation with Qualifications Wales and CCEA Regulation, we announced decisions in February on changes to Condition F1. These changes will come into force on 18 January 2021.

We subsequently consulted between 20 February and 30 September 2020 on proposed statutory guidance to accompany Condition F1. The consultation sought views on our proposed guidance, designed to help awarding organisations understand the new requirements for publication of fee information.

This document provides a summary of the responses we received to our consultation.

Consultation questions

We asked respondents to tell us the extent to which they agreed or disagreed that the proposed guidance would help awarding organisations understand the requirements of Condition F1, and also asked them to explain their response.

Respondents indicated their opinion using a 5-point scale:

- strongly agree
- agree
- neither agree nor disagree
- disagree
- strongly disagree

We asked a further open question inviting comments on any fees for which the proposed guidance does not provide sufficient clarity on fee publication. We asked respondents to comment on any expected regulatory or equality impacts of the proposed guidance.

We published the consultation on our website, and respondents could use an online form, send an email or post a response to us. Respondents did not have to answer all the questions.

Who responded?

We received 22 responses to our consultation.

Twenty were official responses from organisations, and two were personal responses from individuals.

Of the 20 official organisation responses:

- 18 were from awarding organisations
- 1 was from a representative organisation for awarding organisations
- 1 was from a quality assurance body for dance, drama and musical theatre.

The 2 respondents responding in a personal capacity identified themselves as Responsible Officers in recognised awarding organisations.

All respondents stated that they were based in England.

Approach to analysis

The nature of the consultation meant that only those who chose to participate expressed their views. As such, they cannot be considered a representative sample of any specific group.

During the analysis, we read every response in full and summarise in this report the range of views respondents expressed.

Analysis

Guidance to Condition F1

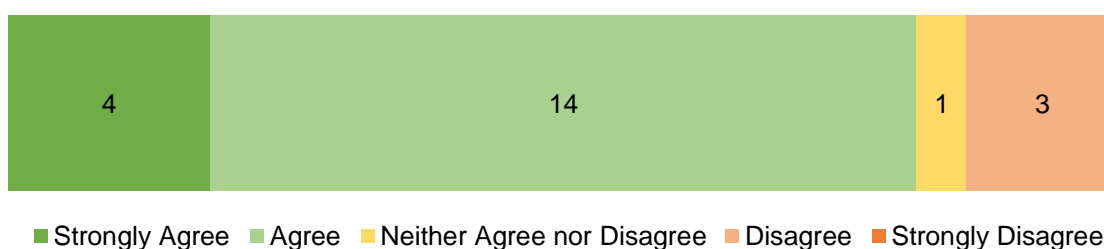
Question 1: To what extent do you agree or disagree that the proposed guidance will help awarding organisations to understand the requirements of Condition F1?

Please explain your response

Question 2: If applicable, please provide details of any learner or qualification- related fees for which the proposed guidance does not provide sufficient clarity on how they should be published?

As illustrated in Figure 1 below, 18 respondents (17 organisations, one individual) either agreed or strongly agreed that the guidance would help awarding organisations understand Condition F1. One respondent (an organisation) neither agreed nor disagreed and 3 (two organisations, and an individual) disagreed.

Figure 1: Overview of responses to Question 1



Eighteen respondents explained their response to question 1, and 10 provided comments in response to question 2. Respondents raised similar themes across both questions, so – for ease of reading and to avoid repetition – we have analysed both questions together.

We report comments of those who agreed or strongly agreed separately from the comments of those who disagreed.

Views of those who agreed or strongly agreed that the guidance would help awarding organisations understand the requirements of Condition F1

Fifteen respondents who agreed or strongly agreed that our proposed guidance would be helpful explained their response, with a number commenting that overall the guidance was clear and helpful, and that it provided sufficient clarity on what awarding organisations were expected to do. Some added they were confident that they will be able to comply with the requirements. One respondent who strongly agreed said that while they considered the guidance was prescriptive and could be considered as part of the requirement rather than guidance, they believed it would ensure consistency in the information awarding organisations publish and provide transparency to potential purchasers.

Some respondents, while agreeing or strongly agreeing that the proposed guidance will be helpful to awarding organisations, also expressed views on where they thought the guidance could be improved or made clearer. Their comments are summarised below:

- Three respondents expressed a view that the wording in the guidance that fee information should be available without it having to be requested does not align with the wording in Condition F1.1 that awarding organisations must publish fees 'where possible'. They suggested that the wording of the guidance should be revised so as to fit better with the Condition.
- Five respondents commented that the guidance sets out that awarding organisations are required to publish fees for their qualifications and all associated services on a publicly-accessible website, but that this requirement is not explicitly included in the Condition. They added that the guidance should be amended to better fit with the Condition. (This was also raised by a respondent who disagreed).
- Three respondents commented that the guidance should make clear that the requirements in F1.1 – F1.4 apply only in England and do not apply in international markets. (This was also raised by a respondent who disagreed).
- Two respondents said they considered the meaning of 'associated services' is unclear. (This was also raised by a respondent who disagreed).
- One respondent expressed a view that clarity is needed on who is the purchaser – whether centre or learner – and that examples should be included in the guidance. (Similar comments, relating to centre fees, were made by two respondents who disagreed).
- One respondent requested that the guidance be revised to describe more clearly the overlap and relationship between fee categories. They noted that it

would be unhelpful to centres and learners if awarding organisations took different approaches to calculating the Standard Qualification Fee (SQF).

- One respondent commented that the wording “the lowest cost combination of options” for the standard qualification fee might cause confusion if learners then chose a more expensive option that resulted in a higher fee being paid. (This was also raised by a respondent who disagreed).
- Two respondents commented that clarity was needed on the meaning of “periodic or lifetime learner registration fees”.
- One respondent commented that clarity was needed on the meaning of a ‘year’ – for example, whether an academic or calendar year.
- One respondent said the guidance does not cover fees for enquiries about results (now known as reviews of marking, moderation and appeals).
- One respondent queried whether they would be required to provide a breakdown of each cost which is a component part of the SQF if requested by any Centre or Learner.

Views of respondents who disagreed that our proposed guidance would help awarding organisations understand the requirements of Condition F1

The 3 respondents who disagreed that our proposed guidance would help awarding organisations understand the requirements of Condition F1 explained their responses. Some comments were the same as, or similar to, those made by those who agreed with the guidance:

- One respondent responding in a personal capacity disagreed with the guidance on the basis that the standard qualification fee excludes ‘centre-charged assessment delivery costs’. They noted that as the centre fee is the cost of the qualification to learners, they should know this cost before registering for a qualification.
- One awarding organisation disagreed with the guidance for similar reasons, stating that the fees that learners pay are set by centres, not an awarding organisation. This respondent added that it was not clear how or what fees should be published relating to the delivery of qualifications levied at a cohort level. They said that clarity is needed on ‘requirements for publishing fee information when these fees are set by centres, and when fees to centres are not mandated at cohort level (i.e. are charged per candidate)’.
- One awarding organisation disagreed that our guidance would be helpful on the basis that while the guidance was concise, some rewording and clarification was needed. They said that it would be useful to have guidance on the provision in Condition F1.1(e), where it is not possible for an awarding

organisation to publish the qualification fee information required under F1.1(a)-(d). They also expressed a view that the guidance should include information on how non-pricing elements would be captured, such as free resources, quality of service or other aspects that make up a consideration of value for money, given that such factors are also relevant to purchasing decisions. This respondent also made similar comments to those made by respondents who agreed or strongly agreed with the guidance, as reported above, including that:

- the guidance refers to publication on a publicly accessible website, whereas Condition F1 does not;
- the meaning of 'associated services' is not clear;
- the wording 'lowest cost combination' in relation to the SQF could be misleading if the purchaser could be charged a higher fee – suggesting 'typical cost' as an alternative to 'lowest cost';
- the guidance should make clear that the requirements apply in England only.

Views of respondent who neither agreed nor disagreed

The one respondent who responded 'neither agree nor disagree' (an awarding organisation) did not provide any comments under question 1 or 2 to explain their response.

Regulatory Impact Assessment

Question 3: Please provide any comments on our assessment of the expected regulatory impact of the proposed guidance, including any impacts that we have not considered.

The majority of respondents either chose not to respond to this question or responded to say they did not anticipate any additional burden. A few said that the provision of guidance would minimise burden on awarding organisations by helping them understand how to comply with the new requirements. One awarding organisation noted that the prescriptive nature of the guidance would be helpful in reducing burden.

A few respondents provided more substantive comments about the expected regulatory impact, as follows:

- two respondents (including an awarding organisation who disagreed that the guidance is helpful) queried whether a competition impact assessment had been carried out on the new requirements in Condition F1, and if any such assessment could be made available. One asked whether and how concerns

raised in Ofqual's 2010 '[increasing the transparency of qualifications fees](#)' report had been or would be addressed.

- one respondent noted that purchasers could request a breakdown on invoices of the components of the fee types, though adding that they did not consider the burden of this would be unmanageable.
- one respondent who disagreed with the guidance requested that we share information to show how we arrived at the estimate of costs that would be incurred by awarding organisations as a result of the changes to Condition F1, as set out in the 3 country decisions published in February. They said that while it was difficult to quantify the time and cost involved, they considered the burden and cost to their organisation (including on system development) would be significantly more than estimated.

Equality Impact Assessment

Question 4: Please provide any comments on our assessment of the equality impact of the proposed guidance, including any impacts that we have not considered.

One awarding organisation noted that the changes in this area are helpful in terms of accessibility and are welcomed.

One awarding organisation noted there may be 'categories of persons that have limited, or no, access to web-published materials – if indeed this were a primary regulatory requirement.'

The remaining respondents either did not respond to this question, or responded that they agreed with our equality impact assessment in the consultation and had no further comments.

Annex A: List of organisational respondents

When completing the consultation questionnaire, respondents were asked to indicate whether they were responding as an individual or on behalf of an organisation. Below we list those organisations that submitted a non-confidential response. Two respondents who indicated they were responding on behalf of an awarding organisation did not provide an organisation name.

- Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music
- Association of Chartered Certified Accountants
- Cambridge Assessment English
- Cambridge Assessment International Education
- Chartered Institute of Credit Management
- Chartered Institute of Housing
- City and Guilds
- Council for Dance, Drama and Musical Theatre
- Counselling and Psychotherapy Central Awarding Body
- Federation of Awarding Bodies
- Gateway Qualifications
- Innovate Awarding
- Institute of Commercial Management
- Logic Certification Limited
- NCFE
- OCR
- Pearson Education
- Training Qualifications UK



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