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Rewarding Learning



Learning+Skills Council

An evaluation of Entry level qualifications

A joint project by QCA, ACCAC, CCEA and LSC

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Executive summary

Introduction

QCA worked jointly with ACCAC, CCEA and the Learning Skills Council (LSC) National Office to carry out this evaluation of Entry level qualifications. This is the first large-scale evaluation of these qualifications since they were introduced in 1998 following recommendations from Sir Ron Dearing's *Review of qualifications for 16–19 year olds*. The aims of the evaluation were to find out how extensively the qualifications are being used, how effective they are and where improvements are needed. The regulatory authorities will use the recommendations here to inform future programmes.

Context

The evaluation took place at a time of renewed focus on learning below level 1 of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF). In August 2003, Entry 2 Employment (E2E) was implemented in England. This gave learners working at Entry level and level 1 specially-tailored programmes to help them address barriers to learning and progress towards employment (perhaps through further learning or training). At the same time, the government's Working Group for 14-19 Reform in England has pledged to develop a framework of diplomas to meet the needs of all learners and has recently begun work on an Entry level diploma which will record the achievements of all learners working below level 1.

In Wales, the *Learning Country: Learning Pathways 14-19 Action Plan* covers all 14-19 year-old learners, with the aim that 95 per cent of young people will be ready for high-skilled employment or higher education by 2015. In Northern Ireland, CCEA is producing options for developing the curriculum and qualifications for 14-19 year-olds. These proposals will take an inclusive approach and will therefore need a focus on Entry level qualifications.

Methodology

The evaluation involved a literature review and a statistical analysis of quantitative data provided by the awarding bodies. We held focus groups with providers and awarding body representatives. We also held interviews with learners, a small number of employers and with a range of other interested parties. A postal survey of providers was also carried out.

Extent of take-up

The data gathered from awarding bodies as part of this evaluation was incomplete and, because different awarding bodies had coded data in different ways, it was not possible to produce a single data set. However from the data gathered, it is clear that Entry level qualifications have sizeable take-up which since their introduction has grown steadily to over 230,000 registrations in 2002/3. A wide variety of learners use the qualifications in a range of settings. Around two-thirds of candidates are male. More candidates are aged 16 and below than are aged over 16. The most frequently taken qualifications are those in the national curriculum subjects of English, mathematics, modern foreign languages and science. Take-up is lowest in occupationally-specific vocational qualifications. There is a significant difference between the number of registrations and the number of awards made. In qualifications that provide progression to GCSEs, around two-thirds of candidates registered achieve an award. In other qualifications the ratio varies considerably, with some qualifications having achievement rates as low as 15 per cent.

Effectiveness of the qualifications

The qualifications were seen as effective in motivating learners to stay in learning, in increasing confidence, in helping learners to achieve their targets and in promoting progression both to other areas of learning at the same level and to related areas at level 1 and above. They were also seen as adding structure, rigour and pace to teaching and as raising teachers' expectations of learners.

Teachers saw the availability of nationally recognised qualifications within the NQF as being particularly valuable. They also valued the national standards for assessment and the ability of students to achieve certificated units. Most teachers used Entry level qualifications because they matched learners' needs and would help them to achieve their aims. Some gave other reasons, including funding, the need to meet basic skills targets, advice from inspectorates and pressure from senior managers. In some cases, these pressures were leading to inappropriate use of the qualifications.

While learners appreciated the opportunity to gain qualifications and to have their achievements recognised, many were unaware that the qualifications had any national status. Some learners enjoyed being able to take part in public qualifications in the same way as their more able peers. Almost all thought that gaining qualifications was the key to gaining employment. Employers, however, were largely unaware of the qualifications and therefore did not value them. At this level they were more interested in general employability skills. Many teachers saw this lack of understanding as undermining the intrinsic value of the qualifications, even though one of their main aims is to provide progression towards rather than directly into employment.

Basic skills, national curriculum subjects, skills for working life and sector-specific learning were all seen as appropriate for accreditation through an Entry level qualification. There was less agreement about the role of qualifications in personal and social skills learning. While some respondents thought that setting personal targets and measuring progress was a more useful approach to assessing progress, others believed that wider key skills standards should be developed as the basis for Entry level qualifications.

Respondents thought that the existing set of Entry level qualifications was largely sufficient, except in the case of sector-specific vocational qualifications where providers thought that more were needed. There were also calls for more small qualifications (suitable for people with limited time to access the necessary learning) and more consistent use of unit certification.

External assessment was seen as important for the status of the qualifications and for helping to ensure that standards are consistent. However the evaluation identified inconsistencies in standards required across subjects and across awarding bodies. Awarding bodies also reported that external moderators needed to adjust a fair number of teacher assessment decisions. Given the relative newness of the qualifications, this level of inconsistency is not surprising.

Some respondents criticised some of the approaches to assessment. Issues included the administrative burden of assessment, the mis-match between the skills being assessed and the method of assessment, and an over-reliance on paper-based evidence or evidence which lends itself easily to external moderation. Not all awarding bodies have taken full advantage of the flexibility allowed within the accreditation criteria, and where they have done so, centres have not always used this flexibility to best effect.

Qualifications are sometimes being misused. Examples included teachers allowing an Entry level qualification to dictate a learner's entire curriculum, classroom-dominated learning programmes for practical subjects, and candidates being inappropriately entered for qualifications (including learners working at pre-Entry level who lacked the cognitive abilities to access the learning, learners who were not interested in the content of the qualification and more able learners with emotional and behavioural difficulties who felt patronised by the content).

While being outside the original scope of the evaluation, issues relating to pre-Entry learning came up throughout the consultation exercise. Teachers felt that learning at this level does not have a high enough status, that the quality of external awards available is very varied, and that getting funding for programmes is unnecessarily complicated.

Conclusions

Entry level qualifications have been beneficial to teaching and learning. They motivate learners, increase their confidence and help them to progress. They help teachers to create better-quality learning programmes and encourage them to raise their expectations of learners.

Improvements in standard setting and assessment are still needed. More information and guidance will help make sure that qualifications are used appropriately and are understood and valued by key user groups, including employers. More vocational Entry level qualifications should be developed and thought needs to be given to how best to accredit personal and social skills learning. A process for collecting robust data about Entry level qualifications also needs to start.

In taking forward this work, it will be important to take account of other relevant programmes, including the E2E initiative, the work of the Tomlinson Working Group in England, Learning Pathways 14-19 in Wales and the 14-19 curriculum/qualifications developments in Northern Ireland. At the heart of all these programmes must be a shared vision of how the learning needs of those working below level 1 of the NQF can best be met.

Recommendations

Recommendations are given in full in the main body of the report. Below is a summary of the recommendations cross-referenced to where they appear in the report. To address the areas below, QCA should work with its regulatory partners, ACCAC in Wales and CCEA in Northern Ireland.

Awareness raising

The regulatory authorities should design and implement a strategy to promote Entry level qualifications to key user groups including teachers, learners, parents and employers. (Recommendation 15.)

Developing new qualifications

Vocational qualifications

The regulatory authorities should work with awarding bodies and Sector Skills Councils (SSCs) on the development of a range of appropriate vocational qualifications. This work should consider the value of setting down standards for employability as the basis for the qualifications. These standards would identify the skills that are important for progression both directly into employment and to vocational qualifications further up the framework.

Personal and social skills

The regulatory authorities should analyse the work that various agencies are doing to measure the distance travelled and record learning in non-formal settings. They should then present a proposal of how best to record and celebrate achievement in personal and social skills, including the possibility of developing standards at Entry level in the wider key skill areas.

Level 1

The regulatory authorities should review provision at level 1 to ensure that there are enough progression opportunities for Entry level learners. (Recommendations 5, 7, 10, 12, and 13.)

Improving specifications

When awarding bodies apply to extend the accreditation of existing qualifications, they should clearly identify target groups for each qualification, provide specific information about what capabilities learners need to access the learning, and unitise the content as required by the Common Criteria. They should also consider the value of using transcripts alongside certificates for some Entry level qualifications. (Recommendations 5, 6, 9 and 14.)

Assessment and moderation

The regulatory authorities should work with the awarding bodies to ensure that they make full use of the flexibility allowed by the accreditation criteria in relation to assessment and external moderation. There is flexibility in the types and frequency of assessment, the forms of evidence and the means of quality-assuring teachers' assessment decisions. There should be a balance between reliability, validity and appropriateness for the learner and manageability and cost-effectiveness for the awarding body. (Recommendations 3 and 16.)

Advice and guidance

The regulatory authorities should work with awarding bodies and practitioners to develop guidance that includes examples of flexible and inclusive approaches to assessment, information on the appropriate use of the qualifications, and guidance on standards. QCA should promote its existing information on developing a learner-centred curriculum for 16–24 year-olds. (Recommendations 4, 8, 9 and 17.)

Teaching and learning

The regulatory authorities should recommend that inspectorates gather evidence of the impact of Entry level qualifications on teaching and learning. (Recommendation 2.)

Pre-Entry learning

The regulatory authorities should work with the necessary partners to ensure that the needs of learners working at pre-Entry level are met. In particular, work is needed to ensure that pre-Entry achievement (including distance travelled) is properly recorded and that programmes of learning are quality assured. QCA should also tell LSC about the difficulties that providers have had in accessing funding for learning at this level, and encourage LSC to review its approach to funding below the level of the NQF. ACCAC in Wales and CCEA in Northern Ireland should do the same in parallel. (Recommendations 18 and 19.)

Data

The regulatory authorities should require the awarding bodies annually to report data on Entry level qualifications to a central point. They should also work with the necessary agencies to explore ways of gathering data on progression. (Recommendations 1 and 11.)

Background

Sir Ron Dearing first recommended the inclusion of an Entry level into the proposed National Qualifications Framework in 1996. The intention was to 'encourage and recognise achievement by a wider range of learners than at present'¹. Dearing recognised that while a number of awards aimed to encourage, motivate and recognise the achievements of young people leaving school or college without GCSEs, none had national currency. He envisaged 14-16 year-olds unable to cope with the demands of GCSE, as well as older students, taking Entry level qualifications. He identified three primary target groups for the qualifications: low attainers; under-achievers and those with learning difficulties.

Since April 1998 when the regulatory authorities first began to approve Entry level qualifications, more than 20 awarding bodies have submitted over 250 qualifications to QCA in a wide range of subject and sector areas. Some of these existed at the time that Dearing published his review. Others have been developed since. During the first two years a large number of unsuitable qualifications were submitted. Many were pitched at an inappropriate level; some did not contain enough external assessment; others did not adequately specify the content to be covered. 159 Entry level qualifications have now been accredited. These cover almost all subjects for which GCSEs exist, basic skills including ESOL, life skills, skills for working life and a small range of vocationally specific areas.

Given the number of qualifications, the length of time they have had to 'bed down' and the scale of take-up, QCA, ACCAC and CCEA judged that enough evidence existed to carry out an evaluation of the qualifications and to make recommendations for any necessary changes. The qualifications were evaluated against Dearing's original objectives and against the needs of a wider range of users, including E2E learners supported by LSC funding.

Context

The evaluation was done at a time of renewed focus on learning below level 1 of the NQF. In August 2003, Entry 2 Employment (E2E) was implemented in England. This gave learners working at Entry level and level 1 specially tailored programmes to help them address barriers to learning and progress towards employment (perhaps through further learning or training). At the same time, the government's Working Group for 14-19 Reform in England has pledged to develop a framework of diplomas to meet the needs of all learners and has recently begun work on Entry level diploma which will record the achievements of all learners working below level 1. In Wales, the *Learning Country: Learning Pathways 14-19 Action Plan* covers all 14-19 year-old learners, with the aim that 95 per cent of young people will be ready for high-skilled employment or higher education by 2015. In Northern Ireland, CCEA is drawing up proposals for developing the curriculum and qualifications for 14-19 year-olds.

Throughout the review, we have paid careful attention to the progress of related projects (not only those listed above but also work on unitisation and credit, the Skills for Life initiative and the DfES Standards Unit's work on quality of teaching and learning). The recommendations made in this report therefore take account of the work of these projects.

¹ Review of Qualifications for 16 to 19 year olds (Sir Ron Dearing, 1996)

Aims

The aims of the evaluation were to identify:

- the extent to which Entry level qualifications are used
- how effective the qualifications are
- areas for improvement, and how these improvements could be made.

Methodology

A set of central research questions was drawn up with the help of a project advisory group representing a range of key interest groups.² The group also advised on the most effective ways of getting answers to these questions. We agreed the methodology outlined below.

The first phase of the research included a literature review³ and a statistical analysis⁴ of quantitative data provided by the awarding bodies about registrations made and certificates awarded. Although there was very little literature on Entry level qualifications beyond that produced by QCA, there was a number of recurring issues that were fed into the second phase for further investigation.

The second phase of the research comprised a series of focus groups, four with teachers/trainers and one with awarding body representatives. We held two teacher/trainer focus groups in London, one in Sheffield and an abridged version at a conference organised by Skill in Coventry. A total of 28 teachers/trainers attended the focus groups. Of the 18 awarding bodies offering Entry level qualifications, 14 sent representatives to the London-based focus group.

A third phase of the investigation ran at the same time as the focus groups. This involved interviewing learners, employers and other interested parties.⁵ A total of 97 learners aged between 15 and 51 from ten different centres took part and were interviewed in small groups at their own centre. Despite concerted efforts by QCA, only three employers agreed to be interviewed.

A total of five other interviewees were chosen from key interest groups to give input from a range of perspectives. There was a separate exercise⁶ to analyse data on how qualifications are used by E2E pathfinders, including telephone interviews with some providers.

The final phase of the research was a questionnaire to teachers/trainers. Questionnaires were sent to 600 centres that had offered Entry level qualifications over the past three years. 148 questionnaires were returned and analysed.⁷

² A full list of the membership of this group is available at appendix 1

³ A copy of the literature review is available at appendix 2

⁴ A copy of the summary report of this analysis is available at appendix 3

⁵ A full list of all organisations interviewed is available at appendix 4

⁶ A copy of the E2E research report is available at appendix 5

⁷ A copy of the questionnaire is available at appendix 6

Consultants and QCA staff carried out the research, which was discussed with the advisory group and colleagues from ACCAC, CCEA and LSC before being formally drawn together by the project manager at QCA.

Work has also started on a separate monitoring exercise which focuses specifically on external assessment – an area which providers and other interested parties discussed at length during earlier phases. This exercise looks at two different approaches to external assessment taken by two different awarding bodies for qualifications with the same title. The findings will inform the advice on external assessment that is produced as a result of this evaluation.

Findings

These findings are organised under headings that reflect the areas addressed by the research.

To what extent are Entry level qualifications used and is it possible to identify any patterns in their usage?

Before this evaluation, there had been no attempt centrally to gather quantitative data about Entry level qualifications. Although various bodies – including the DfES, LSC (through the Individual Learner Record), QCA and Joint Council of General Awarding Bodies – had collected some relevant information, there was no way of combining it into a central data set. Since awarding bodies had not previously been required to report data in a systematic way, some struggled to provide information in the format requested for this evaluation. For example, not all were using the coding list for ethnicity required by the regulatory authorities. They were also using a range of different coding lists for centre type. Some awarding bodies could not provide any data on ethnicity, age or gender for individual qualifications. In addition, with no unique learner or centre identifier, we could not identify how many learners have either registered or achieved Entry level qualifications or how many centres are involved in delivering them. The work that the LSC and DfES are doing in this area should make it possible to collect data in more sophisticated ways in future.

The figures below are based on information provided by awarding bodies. Given the unreliability of the data, these findings should not be seen as conclusive or complete. We have, however, been able to extract some useful information.

Candidate registrations

According to the data provided, the total number of candidate registrations has increased steadily since 2000 from 200,886 in 2000/01 to 232,493 in 2002/3, with a total of 645,127 registrations over the three years. Several awarding bodies could not give full details of registrations, so the overall figure is likely to be higher than those recorded here.

Most of the candidates who registered (around 60 per cent) were male. However, over the three years, the number of female candidates registering increased more than the number of male candidates. (The increase in registrations by male candidates from 2000/1 to 2002/3 was 1 per cent compared to a 9 per cent increase in registrations by female candidates.) Over the three years, by far the greatest number of registrations came from pre-16 candidates (77 per cent). However, while the figure for pre-16 entries stayed fairly static, the number of registrations for post-16s rose from 19 per cent in 2000/1 to 26 per cent in 2002/3. Registrations were highest for the national curriculum-based qualifications, with modern foreign languages, English, mathematics and science attracting the highest numbers of candidates.

Certificates awarded

Not all the awarding bodies could provide data on the number of certificates awarded. For those who provided data, the total remained steady over the three-year period (at just over 150,000 each year). However with significant amounts of data missing, the number of successful candidates is likely to be considerably higher. For qualifications providing progression to GCSEs, the proportion of candidates registering who achieve an award is around two thirds.

For other qualifications, the proportion is generally lower and varies considerably across qualifications with some recording just 15 per cent of candidates registering achieving an award. However, in areas such as life skills where a lot of candidates may have considerable learning difficulties, progress is often slow and candidates may be moving steadily over several years towards gaining the full award. Given the relative newness of many of the qualifications in these areas, many candidates will not yet have had enough time to complete their course.

The overall achievement rate by gender exactly mirrors the registration figures, with 60 per cent of certificates awarded going to males and 40 per cent to females. However, there are interesting anomalies which again reflect take-up patterns. For example, significantly more adult literacy awards have gone to female candidates than to males. Also in line with registration patterns is the breakdown of awards by age. In adult literacy and numeracy (which were not available to the pre-16s when the data was collected), ESOL and business language competence, awards have mainly gone to post-16s. Of the limited number of candidates taking job-seeking, personal development and preparation for employment certificates, most awards have also been to post-16s. Data was not available on all the life skills or skills for working life qualifications, which are also likely to attract post-16 candidates. Between 8 per cent and 11 per cent of certificates in English, mathematics, art and design, and travel and tourism have been awarded to post-16s. In all other cases the percentage of awards made to post-16s is 5 per cent of the total or less.

Where qualifications allow for achievement at three different sub-levels, in general, awards were spread fairly evenly across Entry 1, Entry 2 and Entry 3 with slightly more awards at Entry 1 than at either of the other sub-levels. The weighting towards Entry 1 is probably caused in part by some approaches to awarding which result in incomplete assessment evidence leading to the award of a lower sub-level. It is clear, however, that many learners taking Entry level qualifications are not using them as a means of direct progress to level 1.

Centres delivering Entry level qualifications

Almost all the awarding bodies provided data about registered centres. In 2002/3 there were almost 12,000 centre registrations across the awarding bodies ranging from over 3,200 with the largest awarding bodies to just 13 with the smallest. A separate exercise suggests that the registrations come from around 1,100 centres, with many centres registering with two or more awarding bodies in order to offer a range of qualifications.

Most of the awarding bodies provided data on centre type, although not all were using the same coding system. From the data available, it is clear that most of centres entering candidates for Entry level qualifications are mainstream schools. The next largest group is FE/tertiary colleges, followed by training providers and special schools and colleges. It is important to note that because data about skills for working life and life skills qualifications is missing, it is likely that the number of FE centres is under-represented in this survey (although they are still likely to be outnumbered by mainstream schools). By far the largest proportion of *candidates*, however, is from FE colleges. In 2003/4 these may, according to the postal survey, have up to 15 times the number of candidates as secondary schools and special schools combined.

Further patterns of usage

The postal survey (based on returns from just under 150 centres) revealed that Entry level qualifications are used by a diverse range of learners in a wide range of settings. Learners include those with moderate and severe learning difficulties, those with emotional and behavioural difficulties, those with pressing social needs, disaffected learners, learners who need additional motivation or confidence-building and older learners who may have been out of formal education for some time. That is not to say that *all* learners in these groups are – or would benefit from – using Entry level qualifications.

Entry level qualifications are being used in schools, colleges, adult education, training centres, the workplace, prisons, pupil referral units and local projects for specific groups of learners. Schools are the biggest providers of national curriculum-related qualifications, while training providers and colleges concentrate more on literacy and numeracy, life skills and skills for working life. Vocational Entry level qualifications (of which there are only a few) have the lowest take-up rates. However some training providers said that if there were more appropriate vocational qualifications, they would use them.

The qualifications are used as part of a range of different programmes. They are being built into combined GCSE and Entry level programmes, particularly at key stage 4, and also form the basis of some school/college link programmes. They are also being used as part of discrete provision for learners with learning difficulties or with basic skills or ESOL needs (particularly in colleges and training centres), and to a lesser extent are included in E2E programmes. Given the relative newness of E2E and the lack of awareness about the qualifications among some user groups, it is likely that with appropriate information, providers will make more use of them.

Conclusions

The data gathered here gives a partial picture of how Entry level qualifications are used. The amount and quality of the data varied considerably and the fact that it was recorded differently by different awarding bodies meant that it was difficult to collate in any meaningful way. While we have been able to make some interesting observations, it has not been possible to draw any firm conclusions. If future research is to be valid and reliable, data on Entry level qualifications must be collated by the awarding bodies in a systematic way and reported uniformly to a central body.

Recommendation 1

The regulatory authorities should draw up a set of requirements for data about Entry level qualifications which the awarding bodies must report annually to the regulatory authorities.

Do Entry level qualifications enhance the learning of those working below level 1 of the NQF?

Almost all those who took part in the evaluation believed that Entry level qualifications enhance the learning of many learners working below level 1 of the NQF. A large proportion of teachers believed that the qualifications helped learners to achieve their targets whether these were set out formally in an Individual Learning Plan or agreed informally at the start of a programme. Significantly, most of those consulted did not frame the targets in qualification terms; the qualifications were being used as vehicles to achieve them. This approach has been recommended in

an earlier piece of research by QCA⁸. Respondents also thought that qualifications help learners to decide their next steps in terms of education and training, and so make more appropriate choices than they might otherwise have done.

Many teachers identified that teaching has been improved as a result of introducing Entry level qualifications. This then had benefits for the learners. In particular, teachers said that the qualifications helped them to structure learning programmes better, raised their expectations of their learners and, to a lesser extent, added pace and rigour to their teaching. One teacher from a special school commented that the notion of 'babysitting' had been dispelled with the introduction of the qualifications. A tutor from an FE college noted that the qualifications had ended what she called 'glorified day care', where experiences and activities had been laid on for learners without any sense of equipping them with relevant or useful skills. Many of the learners interviewed supported this view, saying that their Entry level courses were helping them to find out more about themselves and to pick up practical skills that were useful to them and, in some cases, to their families.

However, a significant number of providers did express some concern that having 'off-the-shelf' qualifications might lead some teachers to use them as a 'substitute curriculum' rather than to design individual learning programmes. This can skew the content of the programme as well as the teaching, learning and assessment methods, leading to a negative learning experience for the learner.

Some teachers also said that the emphasis on national standards was overshadowing the need to record progress in areas that were particularly important to individual learners.

This evaluation is based on the perceptions of teachers, learners and others and did not include any direct observation of teaching and learning. It would be useful to gather more evidence of the impact of Entry level qualifications on teaching and learning.

Recommendation 2

The regulatory authorities should recommend to the inspectorates that inspectors gather evidence of the impact of Entry level qualifications on teaching and learning as part of their routine inspection of provision at this level.

There is some concern among providers that the assessment requirements of some awarding bodies have a negative impact on some learners at Entry level. For example, some providers found the amount of assessment burdensome and felt that it took too much time away from the 'real' job of teaching and learning. Some providers, including a significant number of E2E providers, noted that in some cases the approaches to assessment seemed to need a classroom base. Much of the learning within E2E – and other Entry level programmes – takes place in alternative settings (in young offenders' institutions, community settings, prisons, the workplace). These different contexts have different facilities from those found in schools and colleges.

⁸ 'Progression of learners with SLD/PMLD in FE colleges' (QCA, 2001)

Across the wide range of people consulted, there was concern about the mis-match in some qualifications between what was being assessed and the way in which assessment was done. Particular concerns were raised about some awarding bodies' requirement for paper-based evidence, which was seen as being discriminatory against those with poor literacy skills and excluding entirely some learners with sensory disabilities. The need to produce such evidence was having a negative impact on their learning experience. While some awarding bodies do rely heavily on paper-based evidence (particularly in the national curriculum-based qualifications), a considerable number of Entry level qualifications allow for a much more flexible approach. Here the problem lies more with the providers' mistaken belief that evidence that can be moderated (as required by the awarding body) must be in paper form – in some cases despite guidance from the awarding bodies to advise them otherwise.

Awarding bodies were aware of this issue. Some who ask for a lot of paper-based evidence were concerned about the financial implications of alternative assessment approaches. (A significant number of Entry level qualifications only just break even, while others run at a loss.) Others acknowledged that they need to communicate more clearly to teachers the message that a variety of forms of evidence is acceptable. It was generally accepted that in theory the regulatory authorities' Entry level accreditation criteria allow for fit-for-purpose assessment.

There is a need for clear information about acceptable approaches to assessment that are both fit for purpose and financially viable, with examples, as well as the range of acceptable evidence.

Recommendation 3

The regulatory authorities should ensure that awarding bodies fully understand the flexibility of the accreditation criteria in relation to assessment and that they make full use of that flexibility in their submissions of revised or any new specifications for accreditation.

Recommendation 4

The regulatory authorities should work with awarding bodies and practitioners to produce examples of flexible and inclusive approaches to assessment and evidence of achievement which are already being used within Entry level qualifications.

Do Entry level qualifications encourage a wider range of learners to achieve then those who took publicly recognised qualifications before their introduction?

The introduction of Entry level qualifications has undoubtedly enabled some learners who previously would not have been able to do so, to achieve a nationally recognised qualification. Almost all those consulted stressed that the availability of publicly recognised qualifications within the NQF had a direct impact on the take-up of qualifications and achievement rates for learners working below level 1. They particularly valued the framework for progression that Entry level qualifications provide both through the Entry sub-levels and on into level 1 (see page 20 for more information on progression).

Teachers reported that learners were more motivated, and attributed this directly to the opportunities they had to gain the qualifications. Increased motivation, confidence

and self-esteem were also cited as by-products of learners' involvement with Entry level qualifications and these in turn lead to higher levels of engagement.

A significant proportion of learners who start an Entry level qualification appear (both from the available awarding body data and from teacher accounts) not to achieve the full qualification. However some learners who took part in the evaluation, as well as their teachers, felt that the opportunity to study for the qualification was motivating in itself, and may therefore have helped to keep in education learners who might otherwise have dropped out. Unit certification was seen as particularly important for these groups. A number of providers suggested that it would be useful to have more, smaller Entry level qualifications that could be completed in a shorter amount of time. Several E2E providers pointed out that learners are only with them for a limited period before they are ready to move on. Many other Entry level learners also have a limited amount of time in a particular setting, for example in pupil referral units or young offenders' institutions.

Recommendation 5

The regulatory authorities should advise the awarding bodies that it is important to unitise existing qualifications and that, in most cases, they should do this re-structuring of content before they apply for any extension to the period of accreditation. They should also tell them about the need for smaller-scale qualifications, as long as they offer a coherent 'chunk' of learning.

Learners themselves found it difficult to distinguish between the qualification and the types of learning, type of setting or relationship with their teachers. So when they said they were more motivated, they could not attribute their engagement or enthusiasm to any one factor. Asked whether they were enjoying taking the qualification, they often said that they were, but then went on to make comments like 'they treat you like adults here', 'the workshop is brilliant' or 'we go on lots of visits'. They particularly welcomed the chance to learn in practical situations, whether through visits, simulated settings, work experience or placement, or simply active learning in the classroom. Overall the goal of gaining a qualification seemed to be effective for a large number of learners; as one young learner commented, 'it's the proof you can do stuff, and it's good to get a prize at the end'.

Learners who were not motivated by Entry level qualifications described having to do a lot of 'copying down' or being overwhelmed by the written tests. In these cases, it seemed to be the way in which the qualifications were used rather than the qualifications themselves that was causing the dissatisfaction. Negative responses were more frequent from learners who when asked why they had taken the qualification replied that they had been given no choice. Teachers noted that a small number of learners felt patronised by the language used in the assessment materials.

While teachers noted that the qualifications had motivated learners, including those who had not previously shown enthusiasm, it is important to note that since their introduction there has been no significant reduction in the numbers of those not in education, employment or training (the NEET group). It is probable that those who have benefited from the introduction of Entry level qualifications' would have stayed in education or training in any case. These learners are likely to have had more positive and meaningful experiences than they might otherwise have done. The most difficult groups to reach, however, do not seem to have been re-engaged. E2E with its much broader focus is likely to be more effective in reducing the numbers in the NEET than a qualification alone.

Are some groups of learners better served by Entry level qualifications than others?

Entry level qualifications appear to be appropriate for learners of all ages. However the needs of school-aged learners are often very different from those of older learners and those who want to progress to higher-level vocational qualifications and to employment. Teachers noted that there seems to be little differentiation between qualifications designed to record achievements in national curriculum areas by the end of key stage 4 (perhaps for progression in an academic context) and those designed to promote progression in a more practical or vocational context. They would welcome clearer guidance within specifications about the target candidates and more carefully targeted qualifications.

Recommendation 6

The regulatory authorities should require awarding bodies to be more explicit within specifications about the aims of the qualification and the type of candidates it is designed to benefit.

Both teachers and to a lesser extent learners (particularly in training centres or FE colleges) identified a lack of suitable vocational qualifications at Entry level. This lack of choice may be stopping learners who are more suited to vocational training from participating in appropriate programmes and progressing. It could also mean that these learners are encouraged to opt for less appropriate Entry level qualifications or are placed on programmes that are too demanding for them. Significantly, take-up of the small number of vocational Entry level qualifications that do exist has been low. Given the call for more vocational qualifications, it will be important to identify the reasons for this.

Recommendation 7

The regulatory authorities should work with the awarding bodies (involving SSCs as appropriate) to promote the development of a range of appropriate vocational Entry level qualifications that provide progression to vocational qualifications at higher levels.

Teachers identified that learners who have emotional and/or behavioural difficulties do not always respond well to Entry level qualifications. However, this may be because they are working at a higher cognitive level and are placed inappropriately on Entry level programmes because their behaviour sometimes makes it difficult to place them elsewhere. These may well be the same learners who reported feeling patronised by the qualifications (see page 16). Learners with mental health and social needs were not seen as benefiting greatly from Entry level qualifications, perhaps because these needs had to be addressed before their learning needs could be properly identified and met.

Respondents to the postal survey noted that learners with severe and profound and multiple learning difficulties were not well served by Entry level qualifications. In most cases, they were working at a level below Entry and therefore the findings are not surprising. What is concerning, however, is the practice reported by some teachers of using Entry level qualifications for almost all learners working below level 1, regardless of the severity of their learning difficulties. This seems to stem from a desire to give all learners an opportunity to study for a nationally recognised qualification, and in some cases, the mistaken belief that the LSC will only fund programmes leading to qualifications within the NQF. Another reason may be the

awarding bodies' practice of stating that there are no entry requirements for Entry level qualifications.

Recommendation 8

The regulatory authorities should provide examples of good practice in relation to the appropriate use of Entry level qualifications. Guidance should cover the selection of qualifications as part of initial assessment, integrating them into meaningful learner-centred programmes, assessment methods and evidence collection. It should also make explicit when it would be inappropriate to use an Entry level qualification.

Recommendation 9

Awarding bodies must provide specific information about the capabilities that learners should have in order to benefit from the learning necessary for the qualification (as required by criterion 50 of the revised Common Criteria). QCA should further promote its own guidance called *Designing a learner-centred curriculum for 16–24 year-olds with learning difficulties*, which gives advice on putting together meaningful learning programmes for pre-Entry learners.

What are the key drivers for a teacher in selecting an Entry level qualification for a learner?

Almost all the providers who took part in the evaluation said that they used Entry level qualifications because they matched learners' needs. A similarly large number (81 per cent of respondents to the postal survey) said that raising learners' self-esteem was a primary reason for using the qualifications. Only half of the teachers questioned used the qualifications because they believed learners valued them. The learners interviewed reflected this ambivalence. Although most interviewed were keen to gain a qualification, they were particularly interested in getting a certificate. Few understood the concept of an external award and a fair number said that a certificate from the college would have been just as valuable to them. It appears that it is teachers who want the perceived kudos of an NQF qualification for their learners rather than the learners themselves.

Only a small number of teachers (10 per cent of respondents to the postal survey) believed that employers value Entry level qualifications. It was not clear to teachers whether this was because employers were not aware of them (teachers thought they probably were not) or because they did not consider them useful preparation for employment. (See page 19 for more information on employer views.)

There were other factors influencing teachers' decisions to use Entry level qualifications. A small but significant number said that there was pressure from senior managers to use the qualifications because their status as 'approved' qualifications makes it easier to draw down funding from the LSC. In some cases they were under pressure to use the qualifications with all their pre-level 1 learners (see page 16 for related issues). Some teachers of literacy and numeracy also felt pressurised to use the qualifications to help their organisations meet targets set by the local LSCs for participation and achievement.

In schools, some teachers felt that inspectors expected them to use accredited programmes for all learners. They were therefore using Entry level qualifications as a means to do this. One or two teachers said they had been advised to use the qualifications by inspectors and reflected that this advice had been useful.

Do Entry level candidates use Entry level qualifications to aid progression?

Among teachers, there was a very broad understanding of the notion of progression for learners working at Entry level. They said that the qualifications promoted progression laterally across a range of different areas of learning at the same sub-level, and vertically both through the Entry sub-levels and on to level 1, into further learning or training, into employment and to a lesser extent into independent living. The skills for working life qualifications were seen as particularly helpful in offering a series of vocational tasters that helped learners to make informed decisions about their next steps. Some saw the skills of planning, organising, and portfolio-building as useful in preparing learners for vocational qualifications at a higher level.

Some teachers noted that learners working at Entry level sometimes followed a qualification programme without registering for the qualification, or only entered for units rather than for the full award as a means of preparing for qualifications or programmes at level 1. Entry level certificates in national curriculum areas are often used in this way with decisions about whether learners are to be entered for the Entry level certificate or a GCSE being delayed as late as possible. The programme rather than the qualification was supporting the learners' progression.

Many providers noted that the inclusion of Entry level within the NQF means that learners have a smoother transition from Entry level to level 1. However, several FE tutors noted that while the gap between the top end of Entry level (Entry 3) and level 1 had narrowed to the benefit of some learners, 'a chasm had opened up' between pre-Entry and Entry 1.

A small number of providers noted that some groups of learners do not progress into higher-level qualifications from Entry level qualifications. Some of these learners may have reached their potential within Entry level; but it is also possible that there are not enough relevant level 1 qualifications to which they could progress.

Recommendation 10

The regulatory authorities should review the range of provision at level 1 to ensure that all those capable of moving from Entry level have opportunities to progress to level 1.

In the absence of any firm data about progression from or into Entry level, all evidence is anecdotal. A few isolated destination studies had been carried out by individual or groups of providers but there was no significant body of information.

Recommendation 11

The regulatory authorities should work with the relevant agencies to investigate ways of capturing data about progression both into and from Entry level.

Do all areas of learning (life skills, basic skills, national curriculum subjects, skills for working life, vocational areas) at this level lend themselves to being assessed through a qualification as opposed to a centre-devised award or other programme of learning?

There was broad agreement that basic skills, national curriculum subjects, skills for working life and sector-specific learning all lend themselves well to assessment

through a qualification at Entry level – provided that the approaches to assessment are flexible and fit for purpose. National standards at Entry level in all these areas were thought to be useful.

There was no such consensus around life skills and personal skills. Some teachers felt strongly that Entry level qualifications are not an appropriate way to accredit what they described as ‘soft’ skills. They noted the difficulty in establishing national standards in these areas and suggested that assessing against these standards leads to the development of inappropriate learning programmes, given the highly individualised needs of learners in these areas. Setting personal targets and measuring progress against them was seen as being more appropriate. They also noted that having a qualification in life skills or personal skills could mean that learners were viewed negatively since most other learners do not have a qualification of this kind. Other teachers believed that learners for whom these skills are a high priority should have the opportunity to gain a national qualification for their achievements, particularly if they are unlikely to achieve any other qualifications.

One of the E2E providers noted the absence of the wider key skills at this level. Given the interest from the Tomlinson group in England and 14-19 Learning Pathways in Wales in promoting these skills across the whole proposed diploma framework and the emphasis on personal and social skills within E2E, it will be particularly important to find an effective means of accrediting achievement in these areas. QCA’s planned move towards a broader ‘framework for recognising achievement’, rather than simply a national qualifications framework, will be an important factor. Another factor will be the continuing popularity of awards in non-formal education settings, many of which are now drawn together in the framework established by the Network for Accrediting Young People’s Achievement.

Recommendation 12

The regulatory authorities should analyse the work that various agencies are doing to measure the distance travelled and record learning in non-formal settings. They should then present a proposal of how best to record and celebrate achievement in personal and social skills, including the possibility of developing standards at Entry level in the wider key skill areas.

Do learners, teachers and employers value Entry level qualifications?

Teachers using Entry level qualifications clearly value them as a means of accrediting achievement through publicly recognised qualifications, of raising confidence and self-esteem and of helping learners progress. They also value them as providing a taste of success for groups of learners, many of whom have experienced repeated failure in their education to date. A small but significant number of teachers suggested that some of their colleagues (particularly in FE colleges, and some of their vocational colleagues) did not value the qualifications. Others thought that the clear links between Entry 3 and level 1 vocational qualifications and their inclusion in the NQF had helped to raise the status of Entry level qualifications in the vocational faculties. A small number suggested that senior managers (in schools more often than colleges) did not value the qualifications because they did not attract performance points. This will change from September 2004 when all qualifications within the NQF will attract performance points in the institutional performance tables.

Most of the learners thought that getting a qualification was valuable, particularly as a means of getting a job. The certificate they would get at the end of their course was a motivating factor for many. Most believed that qualifications were essential to employers and that without them they would not even be interviewed. They did not distinguish between qualifications at different levels. For some older learners, working towards a qualification gave them a sense of purpose. Several learners described qualifications as proof of what they had learned and said that they helped them explain to other people what they had done. Some learners who had experienced considerable personal difficulties talked about the value of the qualifications in proving something to themselves.

Some school pupils were less convinced about the value of the qualifications, seeing them as something they were required to do, just as school is somewhere they are required to be. However, others thought getting a qualification helped them feel better about themselves and showed how well they are doing. Some also welcomed the chance to do something similar to their more able peers. This was particularly true in special schools where learners were keen to draw parallels with their peers in mainstream schools.

Learners' understanding of the concept of an external qualification or a national qualifications framework was very limited. Most were therefore not in a position to comment on the value of an external qualification over a local or centre-specific award. When the concept was explained, some learners commented on portability as an added value of a national award.

Despite the learners' belief that the qualifications would be considered favourably by employers, employers do not appear to value Entry level qualifications. The number of employers interviewed during the evaluation was very small. Considerable effort was made to set up interviews but few employers responded to the invitation. Some felt that they could not comment because they knew nothing about the qualifications or learners at this level. Given their busy schedules, others did not think the issue was relevant enough to their business to give time for the interview. Their lack of engagement supports teachers' view that employers on the whole do not value or understand Entry level qualifications.

Of the small number of employers who did take part in the evaluation, only one had any knowledge of the qualifications, and that was one whose business was set up specifically to give employment and training opportunities for those with learning difficulties. None of the large or medium-sized businesses was aware of the qualifications. The employers believed that a potential employee's personality, interest, commitment, ability to fit in, willingness to take instruction and work as part of a team were of more importance than a qualification. Similarly, medical and mental health, ability to manage own medication and personal care and presentation were all cited as key factors over and above qualifications. In other words, they were more interested in general employability skills, aptitudes and behaviours than in qualifications.

Entry level certificates were not generally seen as useful tools in the training of employees in the workplace. Larger employers were in favour of providing bespoke training while smaller employers were more likely to offer individualised on-the-job training aimed at making the employee competent in a particular job role.

Several employers noted that because qualification certificates in general give few details about what the learner has done or achieved, they are less useful than records of achievement. One employer suggested that a record of achievement that

describes what the learner can do would be most helpful, particularly if it had been through a rigorous quality assurance process.

Given the fact that Entry level learners are motivated by a vocational context for their learning, it is important that a range of vocational qualifications are available to them. However, since employers value general employability skills above occupationally-specific learning at this level, these qualifications might usefully combine employability skills with more specific vocational learning. The learners would then gain a set of transferable skills, useful to them both when they enter employment and in progressing to vocational qualifications at level 1 and above.

Recommendation 13

The regulatory authorities should consider the value of identifying employability skills at Entry level. Once contextualised, these could form the basis of vocational qualifications at Entry level.

Recommendation 14

The regulatory authorities should consider the value of transcripts alongside certificates for some vocational Entry level qualifications. The transcript would outline areas of learning covered and mode(s) of learning (including any work experience), and would be quality assured by the awarding body.

Recommendation 15

The regulatory authorities should design and implement an awareness-raising strategy to explain the nature and purpose of Entry level qualifications to key user groups.

Do measures introduced to provide quality assurance and quality control in assessing and awarding qualifications to national standards mean that qualifications have improved?

Evidence from this evaluation shows that many teachers believe that improved quality assurance measures have resulted in more rigorous and reliable assessment procedures. Overall, they value the mandatory element of external assessment, although there is some disagreement about what percentage of the total assessment this should represent. Many feel it is important for learners at Entry level to get used to assessment methods they will encounter when they progress to higher-level qualifications. These methods may not always be beneficial for those who are not using Entry level qualifications as a stepping stone to level 1.

Some teachers had concerns that the approaches to assessment for Entry level qualifications do not necessarily lead to valid measures of achievement. Some thought that the assessment requirements were too onerous and only measured certain skills. Some went as far as to say that the really valuable gains for learners were all by-products of an Entry level programme (increased confidence, positive attitude to learning, staying the course), but were not captured by the assessment for the qualification. They were also concerned about the amount of time needed to do all the assessment and to complete the paperwork that awarding bodies require.

Many teachers were positive about the support they get from awarding bodies in relation to Entry level qualifications. There were, however, some concerns about the procedures that some awarding bodies use for external moderation. Some teachers

thought that the awarding bodies' requirements for assessment were designed more with manageability for moderators in mind than validity or appropriateness for candidates. There was also a feeling that a 'one-size-fits-all' approach to moderation across all types of Entry level qualifications had led to inappropriate approaches in some areas, such as life skills. While some awarding bodies knew about these concerns, they felt restricted by the financial implications of making major changes to their approach.

Recommendation 16

The regulatory authorities should work with the awarding bodies to set out the full range of acceptable methods of external moderation for each Entry level qualification in order to find those that best balance manageability for awarding bodies and reliability, validity and appropriateness for learners. It should then encourage the awarding bodies to offer such flexibility within Entry level qualifications.

See also Recommendation 3.

Has the inclusion of Entry level in the NQF meant that teachers understand external awards better than they did in 1996?

Many teachers felt that they now have a better understanding of standards at Entry level and how they relate to qualifications at other levels. Less than a third of the respondents to the postal survey, however, felt that they thoroughly understood the standard required at each sub-level. Evidence from the awarding bodies would support this view; where external moderation is used, external moderators need to adjust a significant proportion of teacher assessment decisions. Awarding bodies themselves may not be entirely confident of the standards either, with teachers reporting differences across different awarding bodies for qualifications in the same subject and across different subjects within one awarding body. In some cases, the awarding bodies are struggling less with their own understanding of the standards required than with making these clear to assessors.

Recommendation 17

The regulatory authorities should work with the awarding bodies to provide materials which exemplify standards across subjects and across sub-levels within Entry level qualifications.

Do Entry level qualifications meet the learning needs of those working below level 1 or is something else needed as well?

Entry level qualifications were designed for learners capable of attainment at a standard equivalent to national curriculum levels 1, 2 or 3. They were not intended for learners whose cognitive abilities prevent them from accessing learning at this level. Evidence from this evaluation suggests that in some cases, the qualifications are being used by pre-Entry learners. There seem to be a number of reasons for this: lack of understanding of Entry level qualifications; variable quality of pre-Entry awards with no national quality assurance arrangements; lack of status for pre-Entry programmes and awards (they are not part of the NQF and do not contribute to performance indicators); and a more complex funding model (funding is not guaranteed in the same way as for a qualification in the NQF).

Clearly learners working below Entry level need a more individualised curriculum than that which can be offered by qualifications based on national standards. Advice in this area is available on the QCA website in the curriculum guidance material called, *Designing a learner-centred curriculum for 16–24 year-olds with learning difficulties*. However, work may be needed to raise the profile of this advice, to consider how best to raise the status of this type of achievement, to quality assure provision, to ensure that the funding model does not present barriers and that it is properly understood by managers.

Recommendation 18

The regulatory authorities should work with the necessary partners to ensure that the needs of learners working at pre-Entry level are met. In particular, work is needed to ensure that pre-Entry achievement (including distance travelled) is properly recorded and that programmes of learning are quality assured.

Recommendation 19

QCA should tell LSC about the difficulties that providers have had in accessing funding for learning at this level, and encourage LSC to review its approach to funding below the level of the NQF. ACCAC in Wales and CCEA in Northern Ireland should do the same in parallel.

See also Recommendation 9.

Practitioners noted that Entry level qualifications cannot be expected to meet all learning needs. Some had concerns that less confident or less experienced teachers were trying to use them in this way rather than to complement a curriculum framework and individual learning programmes for their learners. Some learners said that they had not been able to follow all their interests because there was no related requirement in the qualification.

Entry level qualifications are unlikely to provide the whole of a curriculum that fully meets a learner's needs. For example they do not address the pre-requisites for learning such as the ability to trust an adult, to share, to stay in a room, to complete a task, or to manage temper outbursts, which some Entry level learners lack when they first start a programme. Practitioners were keen to see this type of learning valued and achievements in these areas recorded (perhaps in terms of distance travelled) and celebrated alongside any achievement of a qualification. E2E providers were particularly keen to continue using awards outside the NQF that mean they can set personalised targets and measure progress through activities chosen by the learner and negotiated with their tutor. It will be important to ensure that there is good-quality provision that has appropriate status in these areas.

See Recommendation 8.

Conclusions

Entry level qualifications have undoubtedly been successful in motivating learners, helping them to progress and giving them opportunities to have their achievements recognised within the same framework as learners at higher levels. They have improved the quality of teaching, raised teachers' expectations of learners and encouraged them to construct relevant learning programmes that offer opportunities for progression.

It is also clear, however, that more work needs to be done. Improvements are needed in terms of standard-setting and fit-for-purpose approaches to assessment. Work must be done to ensure that the qualifications are used appropriately and that they are fully understood and valued by teachers, learners, employers and the wider community. More vocational Entry level qualifications need to be developed, particularly to support E2E programmes. There also needs to be consideration of how best to accredit learning in relation to personal and social skills.

There is a need to collect comprehensive, accurate and centralised data about Entry level qualifications. Without it, we cannot evaluate the impact of the qualifications properly. This evaluation is largely based on perceptions; future research should be based on accurate quantitative data too.

While the evaluation focused on Entry level qualifications, the findings show that work is needed to support high-quality learning programmes for learners working at pre-Entry. Work also needs to be done to ensure there is adequate provision at level 1 to which Entry level learners can progress.

In taking forward this work, it will be important to take account of other relevant programmes, including the E2E initiative, the work of the Tomlinson Working Group in England, Learning Pathways 14-19 in Wales and the 14-19 curriculum/qualifications developments in Northern Ireland. At the heart of all these programmes must be a shared vision of how the learning needs of those working below level 1 of the NQF can best be met.

Acknowledgements

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Learners from the following centres who agreed to be interviewed:

Ashley School
Chase School
Derwen College
Joseph Chamberlain College
Lewisham College
Nacro Centres
Seagull Recycling
St Hughes Special School
South Cheshire College
Willow Bank School

Teachers from the following centres who attended the focus groups:

Academy of Training
Alfriston School
Aspley School
Blackburn College
Blackheath Blue Coat Church Of England Secondary School
College of North West London
Doncaster College
Greenford High School
Kensington and Chelsea College
Lambeth College
Linden Bridge School
Maplewood School
New Horizons School
Seagull Recycling
St Francis Community Special School
Suffolk College
The Shepherd School
Westminster Kingsway College

Representatives from the awarding bodies offering Entry level qualifications who attended the focus group.

Employers who agreed to be interviewed from the following organisations:

B&Q
Chalk Farm Hotel and Plant Centre
Data Connection

Representatives from the following bodies who agreed to be interviewed:

Mencap
Network for Accrediting Young People's Achievement
NACRO
Natspec
Connexions

Members of the advisory group.

Consultants, Pat Hood and Carol Tennyson, who conducted much of the research and Bobbie Hall who carried out the E2E research.

Appendix 1: Members of the Entry level advisory group

| Name | Organisation |
|-------------------|---------------------|
| Helen Tivnan | DfES |
| Verity Donnelly | ACCAC |
| Amanda Simpson | CCEA |
| Sue Gill | ALP |
| Brandon Ashworth | SSDA |
| Sally Faraday | LSDA |
| Janet Ryland | LSC |
| Jeannie Sutcliffe | NIACE |
| Suzanne Mackenzie | NASEN |
| Graham Hoyle | ALP |
| Liz Maudsley | SKILL |
| Karen Adrianse | ALI |
| Susan Preece | Ofsted |
| Judith Norrington | AoC |
| Robert Hill | SHA |
| John McNamara | FAB |
| Tudor Thomas | JCGQ |
| Ruth Perry | QCA |
| John Brown | QCA |
| Alison Matthews | QCA |

Appendix 2: Literature review

Aim

To find out what research into Entry level qualifications has already been done and what the main findings were in order to ensure that key questions arising from the research can be explored further during later phases of the evaluation.

Methodology

The Knowledge Centre at QCA carried out an extensive search for research reports relating to Entry level qualifications. They used a number of research indexes including ERIC, British Education Index, CERUK, Education Research Abstracts, Education line and TES.

Members of the evaluation advisory group were also asked to give details of any relevant research they were aware of.

The team also took into consideration a series of reports collectively called *Assessing pupils, students and trainees with learning difficulties*, which was published by QCA on its website in 2001, and to QCA's separate website, *Designing a learner-centred curriculum for 16–24 year-olds with learning difficulties* set up in 2002.

Findings

The search turned up very little information. Of the small number of reports unearthed, most were written or commissioned by QCA; others originated at FEDA. In most cases, they contained information about the availability of qualifications or the work QCA was doing rather than reflecting on the effectiveness of the provision.

Members of the advisory group alerted us to Ofsted's report *Key Stage 4: towards a flexible curriculum* published in June 2003, which offers comments on the use of Entry level qualifications with disaffected and lower-achieving pupils at key stage 4. This noted that pupils working towards national qualifications were more motivated. The ALI representative noted that ALI had published nothing that looked at accredited Entry level qualifications.

QCA's own work in this area, commissioned by its equal opportunities team over a period of three years, provided a useful source of teachers' views on what constitutes good practice in the use of qualifications at this level. Most of the research focused on post-16 learners, including those with severe or profound and multiple learning difficulties. The learner-centred curriculum website – also relating to post-16 learners – includes little information on how the qualifications are used. This is perhaps a reflection of the difficulties of devising a learner-centred curriculum while meeting the needs of an accredited qualification for adults with learning difficulties.

The most significant recent report into the use of external accreditation below level 1 has been the FEFC's inspectorate report *National awards for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities*, published in November 1999. This report is cited in many of the subsequent, related publications. Although Entry level qualifications were in existence at the time of the report, there were very few accredited qualifications that were suitable for use post-16. The majority were in national curriculum subjects intended as alternatives to GCSEs. The report therefore did not include comments on any accredited Entry level qualifications. Its key findings, however, are very pertinent to this evaluation.

Most of the very limited range of research, much of it carried out in response to the FEFC's 1999 report, relates to the use of qualifications below level 1 for post-16 learners in FE settings. There is little, if any, published research that considers the role of Entry level qualifications for learners pre-16 in either mainstream or special schools, or which looks at how Entry level qualifications are being used by trainees in work-based learning. It is therefore important to remember that the key issues below come mainly from reports that focus on post-16 learners in FE settings.

Key issues

- 'Teachers often use the award framework to replace their own curriculum, lesson plans and schemes of work and, as a result, do not undertake curriculum development to take account of the needs of the students they are teaching.'*
Are Entry level qualifications being used in this way?
- 'Colleges which do not have an externally accredited award as the primary learning goal are better able to set individual targets and to track progress and achievement. Colleges that have external awards as a primary learning goal are less able to manage individual learning confidently.' †
Do Entry level qualifications facilitate or impede individualised approaches to learning?
- 'Little consideration is given to planning valuable learning experiences which will help students to make real progress, learning skills which will be useful to them... Only a minority of awards enhance students' learning and extend their opportunities for achievement. Many awards result in students undertaking inappropriate activities, learning little and being accredited for the completion of a random selection of separate modules which lack overall coherence.'*
Is this teachers' experience of Entry level qualifications?
- 'Collecting and recording evidence was time-consuming for both students and staff, and often involves students in a great deal of form-filling. Many awards require portfolios of evidence...yet...most students at this level did not possess the skills needed to set up and manage a portfolio.' ‡
Are Entry level qualifications over-burdensome in terms of evidence-gathering?
- Before Entry level took up its place in the framework, there was 'a plethora of different awards, supposedly at the same level but in reality requiring very different skills, competences and understanding'.*
Is this still the case?
- In special schools, 'the most effective practice matched accreditation to ability and included GCSE and Entry level awards. A key characteristic of the better practice... was a willingness to adjust programmes to meet individual needs'. †
Are Entry level qualifications being used effectively in mainstream schools as well special schools? Are Entry level qualifications flexible enough to allow for the adjustment described above?
- 'When they [key stage 4 pupils] were working towards recognised qualifications attitudes to learning were markedly better and achievement was

higher.†

Do Entry level qualifications promote a better attitude to learning and greater levels of achievement – across all areas of learning?

Comments come from the following research:

* *National awards for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities*, FEFC, 1999.

† *Key Stage 4: towards a flexible curriculum*, Ofsted, 2003

◇ *Progression of learners with SLD/PMLD in FE colleges*, QCA, 2001

© *Issues raised by practitioners in further education colleges, post-16 units of special schools and training providers*, QCA, 2001

Appendix 3: Quantitative data survey

In May 2003, all the Entry level awarding bodies were asked to provide data on the take-up and achievement of Entry level qualifications from 2000-2003. Specifically they were asked to provide:

- per qualification, the number of candidate entries and the number of certificates awarded, each broken down by gender, age (pre- or post-16), ethnicity and, in the case of awards that offer access to two or more sub-levels, by sub-level awarded (Entry 1, 2 or 3)
- the number and types of centre offering their Entry level qualifications
- percentage of internal assessment decisions requiring adjustment by an external moderator
- the percentage of candidates requesting special assessment arrangements
- information about the financial viability of each qualification.

Before this there had been no attempt to gather this data centrally. Although various bodies – including the DfES, LSC (through the Individual Learner Record), QCA and Joint Council of General Awarding Bodies – had collected some relevant information, there was no way of combining it into a central data set. Since awarding bodies had not previously been required to report data in a systematic way, some struggled to provide information in the format requested. For example, not all were using the coding list for ethnicity required by the regulatory authorities. They were also using a range of different coding lists for centre type. Some awarding bodies could not provide any data on ethnicity, age or gender for individual qualifications. In addition, with no unique learner or centre identifier, we could not identify how many learners have either registered or achieved Entry level qualifications or how many centres are involved in delivering them.

The figures below are based on information provided by awarding bodies. Given the unreliability of the data, these findings should not be seen as conclusive or complete. We have, however, been able to extract some useful information.

Candidate registrations

According to the data provided, the total number of candidate registrations has increased steadily since 2000 from 200,886 in 2000/01 to 232,493 in 2002/3, with a total of 645,127 registrations over the three years. Several awarding bodies could not give full details of registrations, so the overall figure is likely to be higher than those recorded here.

Most of the candidates who registered (around 60 per cent) were male. However, over the three years, the number of female candidates registering increased more than the number of male candidates. (The increase in registrations by male candidates from 2000/1 to 2002/3 was 1 per cent compared to a 9 per cent increase in registrations by female candidates.) Over the three years, by far the greatest number of registrations came from pre-16 candidates (77 per cent). However, while the figure for pre-16 entries stayed fairly static, the number of registrations for post-16s rose from 19 per cent in 2000/1 to 26 per cent in 2002/3. Registrations were highest for the national curriculum-based qualifications, with modern foreign

languages, English, mathematics and science attracting the highest numbers of candidates.

Certificates awarded

Not all the awarding bodies could provide data on the number of certificates awarded. For those who provided data, the total stayed steady over the three-year period (at just over 150,000 each year). However with significant amounts of data missing, the number of successful candidates is likely to be considerably higher.

For qualifications providing progression to GCSEs, the proportion of candidates registering who achieve an award is around two thirds. For other qualifications, the proportion is generally lower and varies considerably across qualifications with some recording just 15 per cent of candidates registering achieving an award. However, in areas such as life skills where a lot of candidates may have considerable learning difficulties, progress is often slow and candidates may be moving steadily over several years towards gaining the full award. Given the relative newness of many of the qualifications in these areas, many candidates will not yet have had enough time to complete their course.

The overall achievement rate by gender exactly mirrors the registration figures with 60 per cent of certificates awarded going to males and 40 per cent to females. However, there are interesting anomalies which again reflect take-up patterns. For example, significantly more adult literacy awards have gone to female candidates than to males. Also in line with registration patterns is the breakdown of awards by age. In adult literacy and numeracy (which were not available to the pre-16s at the point at which data was collected), ESOL and business language competence, awards have mostly gone to post-16s. Of the limited number of candidates taking job-seeking, personal development and preparation for employment certificates, most awards have also been to post-16s. Data was not available on all the life skills or skills for working life qualifications which are also likely to attract post-16 candidates. Between 8 per cent and 11 per cent of certificates in English, mathematics, art and design, and travel and tourism have been awarded to post-16s. In all other cases the percentage of awards made to post-16s is 5 per cent of the total or less.

Where qualifications allow for achievement at three different sub-levels, in general more awards are made at Entry 1 than at Entry 2 or Entry 3 (on average around 37 per cent of awards are at Entry 1, 33 per cent at Entry 2 and 30 per cent at Entry 3). In some cases the differential is much greater; in adult literacy for example, only 6 per cent of awards were at Entry 3 with 62 per cent at Entry 1, while in adult numeracy, just 4 per cent of awards were at Entry 3 with 92 per cent at Entry 1. There are one or two exceptions to this pattern, notably English with 31 per cent achieving at Entry 3 and 26 per cent at Entry 1.

Centres delivering Entry level qualifications

Almost all the awarding bodies provided data about registered centres. In 2002/3 there were almost 12,000 centre registrations across the awarding bodies ranging from over 3,200 with the largest awarding bodies to just 13 with the smallest. A separate exercise suggests that the registrations come from around 1,100 centres, with many centres registering with two or more awarding bodies in order to access a range of qualifications.

Most of the awarding bodies provided data on centre type, although not all were using the same coding system. From the data available, it is clear that most of

centres entering candidates for Entry level qualifications are mainstream schools (62 per cent). The next largest group is FE/tertiary colleges (6 per cent), followed by training providers (3 per cent) and special schools and colleges (2 per cent). It is important to note that because data is missing in relation to skills for working life and life skills qualifications, it is likely that the number of FE centres is under-represented in this survey (although they are still likely to be outnumbered by mainstream schools).

By far the largest proportion of *candidates*, however, is from FE colleges. In 2003/4 these may, according to the data gathered from centres that took part in the postal survey, have up to 15 times the number of candidates as secondary schools and special schools combined.

Special arrangements

Of the awarding bodies that answered the questions about the percentage of candidates requesting special assessment arrangements, only two had received requests. One recorded a figure of just 1.3 per cent while another recorded a figure of 11 per cent (for a particularly practical qualification where those with physical disabilities might well need alternative arrangements). The low level of requests suggests that the approaches to assessment do not provide access problems for the majority of candidates.

Financial information

A significant number of the awarding bodies provided financial information, others chose to withhold it for reasons of commercial sensitivity. We received information about 63 qualifications of which 53 were profit-making, three were breaking even and seven were running at a loss. Those running at a loss all belonged to larger awarding bodies, presumably able to subsidise them through the profit-making qualifications.

External moderation

Only three awarding bodies could give information about the adjustments that external moderators had made to centre assessment decisions, despite the fact that the vast majority of Entry level qualifications rely on external moderation. The data relates to a total of 38 qualifications. One awarding body reported that it had not had to adjust any internal assessment to its qualification. The other two together reported that for seven of their qualifications they had to make no adjustments; for 15 of them between 1 per cent and 10 per cent of centre decisions were adjusted; and for 13 of the qualifications over 20 per cent of centre decisions were adjusted, including three qualifications where over 40 per cent of centre decisions were altered. These figures suggest that in many centres, teachers are not sure of the standards required at each Entry sub-level.

Recommendations

The data gathered here gives a partial picture of how Entry level qualifications are used. The amount and quality of the data varied considerably and the fact that it was recorded differently by different awarding bodies meant that it was difficult to collate in any meaningful way. While we have been able to make some interesting observations, it has not been possible to draw any firm conclusions. If future research is to be valid and reliable, data on Entry level qualifications must be collated by the awarding bodies in a systematic way and reported uniformly to a central body.

QCA should draw up a set of data requirements in relation to Entry level qualifications which the awarding bodies must report annually.

Appendix 4: Organisations consulted as part of the review

Colleges/schools and training providers:

Derwen College
Seagull Recycling
Joseph Chamberlain Sixth Form College
South Cheshire College
Lewisham College
Ashley School
St Hughes Special School
Chase School
Nacro Centres
Willow Bank School
Aspley School
St Francis Community Special School
Seagull Recycling
Blackburn College
Maplewood School
New Horizons School
Westminster Kingsway College
Greenford High School
Lambeth College
Linden Bridge School
Kensington and Chelsea College
Blackheath Blue Coat
The Shepherd School
Suffolk College
College of North West London
Academy of Training
Doncaster College
Alfriston School
Lambeth College
Linden Bridge School

Other interested parties:

Connexions
MENCAP
NACRO
Natspec
Network for Accrediting Young People's Achievement

Employers:

B&Q
Chalk Farm Hotel and Plant Centre
Data Connection

Appendix 5: The use of Entry level qualifications by the Entry to Employment Pathfinders

A report on the use of Entry and other qualifications by providers in the Entry to Employment Pathfinders

**Qualifications and Curriculum Authority
November 2003**

Introduction

The regulatory authorities are now carrying out a wide-ranging evaluation of Entry level qualifications. As part of their review of the effectiveness of the qualifications, they are gathering information on the different settings in which they are used, the different types of learners using them, and the experiences of both teachers and learners.

Running in parallel to this work has been the preparation for the national roll-out of Entry to Employment (E2E), the programme that replaces provision previously provided under Life Skills, Preparatory Training and NVQ learning for those aged 16–19. Since E2E covers Entry level and level 1, there is likely to be some overlap between the client group for E2E and that for Entry level qualifications. This report looks at the qualifications that providers used during the E2E Pathfinder phase, which ran from September 2002 to August 2003. Eleven local Learning and Skills Councils took part in the Pathfinder phase (which implemented the E2E principles and learning programme) to develop good practice. The experiences of the Pathfinders were disseminated through conferences and publications to the remaining local Learning and Skills Councils before the programme was rolled out nationally.

Aims

This research aimed to ascertain:

- the extent of the use of Entry level qualifications by the E2E Pathfinders and what their experiences of the qualifications were
- the full range of accreditation used in the Pathfinder projects and the factors influencing the choice of awards.

Methodology

As part of the development of the E2E programme a short report on the use of qualifications by the Pathfinders had been produced in March 2003. It drew on the experiences of six of the 11 Pathfinders. We considered using this report to identify which qualifications were used. However, because the information was at Pathfinder rather than provider level, there was not enough detail available. We therefore contacted nine Pathfinders in October 2003 to establish which qualifications and informal awards they had used. Seven replied, giving contact information for 19 providers.

To identify which qualifications providers used, we sent a grid to each one asking them to indicate which qualifications they had used (see annex 1). 15 providers replied. Depending on their use or non-use of qualifications at Entry level, we sent one of two questionnaires to each provider (see annexes 2 and 3). While the questionnaires were designed for use in a telephone interview, some providers completed the questionnaire themselves with follow-up by telephone or e-mail. (Most of the research for this project was done by e-mail and/or telephone, with three interviews face-to-face interviews.)

Of the 19 providers contacted, 15 completed the grid and 13 responded to the selected questionnaire.

The grids that were returned showed that few providers were using Entry level qualifications in the National Qualifications Framework (NQF). The focus of the project therefore had to put more emphasis on the use of non-NQF Entry level and on the alternative provision that the E2E providers would deliver. In the course of the interviews, it became clear that a significant number of the providers were unclear about the status of the qualifications they were using (ie the level and whether they were in the NQF or not).

The providers covered a wide range of E2E learners. The most common categories were: those with mild/moderate learning difficulties; the disaffected; ex-offenders/those at risk of offending; the homeless; care leavers; and teenage parents/mums-to-be. Most learners came from urban areas. Although the E2E programme is designed for 16–19 year-olds, there were some over 19 (for example, on extended guarantees), and some under 16 (for example, from pupil referral units).

Providers were: private companies (five), voluntary/charitable organisations (six), further education colleges (one), and local authority training organisations (three). Of these, nine were using Entry level qualifications (of whom eight completed the questionnaire) and six were not (with five completed questionnaires).

Qualifications used

Providers used a range of provision: at Entry level; at level 1 (primarily NVQs); units of level 2 NVQs; awards without an attributable level; and short courses (some certificated, most not). Four providers used Entry level qualifications in the NQF from three awarding bodies. These were in: Adult Literacy (City & Guilds, Education Development International plc/LCCIEB); Adult Numeracy (City & Guilds, Education Development International plc/LCCIEB); Skills for Working Life (City & Guilds, Education Development International plc/LCCIEB); Preparation for Employment (City & Guilds); and Life Skills (ASDAN). Other basic skills awards outside the NQF were used rather more extensively, either using the tests from the Basic Skills Agency or an Open College Network (OCN). However a lot of the basic skills provision was uncertificated.

Entry level awards outside the NQF included: the ASDAN Youth Award Scheme; City & Guilds Profile of Achievement; the Fairbridge Programme (various awarding bodies); Passport to Work (OCN); the Prince's Trust (ASDAN); Youth Achievement Award (UK Youth); and Weston Spirit (City & Guilds, Edexcel). Also at non-NQF Entry level were car and van tyre fitting (City & Guilds) and OCN awards in painting and decorating, bricklaying, complementary therapies, people skills and customer care, dealing with customers, and personal and social development.

Two providers offered Getting Connected (NYA/NIACE), which is equivalent to level 1. Awards without an attributable level were also used, such as U choose (Chrysalis – Club 2000), and the Young Mums To Be Award (NcFE). The most common short course was in first aid, often certificated for 'the appointed person' by St John's or the Red Cross. Many providers delivered food hygiene (nine providers) and/or drugs awareness training (nine providers), but this latter provision was usually uncertificated. Health and safety and manual handling were also uncertificated, usually being part of the induction programme. A small number of providers mentioned Computer Literacy and Information Technology (CLAIT), pre-driving and fork lift truck driving.

Providers offered NVQs in ten sectors. These were: Retailing and Transportation (eight providers); Business (seven providers); Land-based (six providers), Care and

Public Services (five providers); Hair and Beauty (five providers); Hospitality, Travel and Leisure (five providers); ICT (five providers); Engineering (four providers), Construction (three providers); and Visual and Performing Arts (two providers).

While there was a wide range of provision, providers typically used a limited number of awards in-house, although they might buy in additional learning opportunities (such as NVQs) from others. Providers most often chose informal awards to recognise achievement in personal and social development. They used NVQs and OCN awards for vocational accreditation. There was little use of accreditation for basic skills.

Entry level qualifications

Pathfinder provider views on Entry level qualifications

Eight providers (three voluntary organisations, three private providers, one local authority and one further education college) who used Entry level qualifications responded to the questionnaire, of whom four used qualifications in the NQF. Providers variously used NQF awards in Skills for Working Life, Life Skills and Preparation for Employment, while two providers used NQF awards in Adult Literacy and in Adult Numeracy. The most frequently-used Entry level awards outside the NQF were City & Guilds Profile of Achievement, the Fairbridge Programme, the Youth Achievement Award, ASDAN Youth Award Scheme and Weston Spirit.

Entry level qualifications were chosen for a variety of reasons: they were the most appropriate level for the learners; they matched the needs of learners for their vocational development; they were already being used in the organisation; they were user-friendly; or because they had been selected by the provider's head office. In one case, the provider had chosen a particular Entry level award because it could be assessed mainly through observation, which was thought preferable for E2E learners.

All providers saw Entry level qualifications as motivating for learners, although it had not been so initially in two cases. As one provider said, many E2E learners are difficult to motivate and so innovative approaches to delivery had to be devised. Hands-on, interactive and 'fun' programmes were most successful at motivating learners. Success at Entry level encouraged learners to go on to level 1 and certainly helped E2E learners to progress towards their goals, especially when these were linked to the vocational pathway that learners had chosen. They were seen as stepping stones to the next stage, which for most learners was work with training (sometimes on a Modern Apprenticeship), work without training, or further training (typically at a further education college). Completion rates for the Entry level provision were good (100 per cent for two providers if early leavers were excluded). In a couple of cases, none of the learners had yet finished their programmes and so no data was available.

All but one of the eight providers found Entry level qualifications easy to deliver; in four cases this was because they were already using them. The one provider who had not found them easy had needed to invest considerable time and effort when introducing them. They saw the awards as motivating learners, with progression from Entry to level 1. Providers singled out the wide range of optional units as particularly useful. However, another award was criticised for having no flexibility in the choice of units. Attendance and retention were good, comparable or slightly better than other awards that E2E learners were following. Most providers were not planning any significant changes to their provision, although they were continuing to look for ways

to improve, for example by extending the number of options available. Additions to provision they were considering included vocational Entry level qualifications and the use of the DfES Progress File modules.

All providers agreed that there was a place for nationally-recognised Entry level qualifications in the E2E framework to cover the three strands of the E2E curriculum framework: basic skills, personal and social development, and vocational learning. Changes needed to make them more appropriate included the introduction of the wider key skills at this level, no formal tests, unitisation and choice within each award. One comment was that some Entry level awards patronise the more able E2E learners, either in the language or the style used in specifications. They seem to assume that all learners at this level have moderate learning difficulties, whereas some are very able. Against this, one provider stressed that the qualifications must be accessible to those with special needs.

Most of the providers thought that national standards, the measurement of distance travelled and participation were all important at Entry level. Three providers felt that recording distance travelled and participation were more important. They pointed out, however, that this usually depends on the needs of the learner. Again, most believed it was helpful to have national qualifications available at Entry level. One provider said that national qualifications both at Entry level and at level 1 and beyond were needed. Two providers saw level 1 and beyond as better for the vocational strand. One provider stated the need for pre-Entry awards.

Entry level qualifications in the National Qualifications Framework

The Entry level awards in the NQF used by providers covered basic skills, employability and life skills.

The Entry level Certificates in Literacy accredited by City & Guilds and by Education Development International plc (LCCIEB) are available at Entry 1, 2 and 3. These awards cover the national standards for literacy: speaking and listening (listen and respond, speak to communicate, engage in discussion); reading (read and understand, read and obtain information); and writing (write to communicate). The City & Guilds qualification is assessed by a combination of portfolio and short tasks. The short tasks are set by City & Guilds, administered by providers, and moderated by City & Guilds. The portfolios are also moderated by City & Guilds. The LCCIEB qualification is assessed by a combination of a portfolio and a test (three hours in total, which can be spread over several days). The test, which is set by LCCIEB and marked internally, can be administered in an informal way. Both the portfolio and the test are externally verified by LCCIEB.

The Entry level Certificates in Numeracy accredited by City & Guilds and by Education Development International plc (LCCIEB) are available at Entry 1, 2 and 3. These awards cover the national standards in numeracy: understanding and using mathematical information (read and understand, specify and describe); calculating and manipulating mathematical information (generate results); interpreting results and communicating mathematical information (present and explain results). There is a choice of assessment routes for the City & Guilds award: either a test (containing both multiple choice questions and a written assignment) or portfolio work (50 per cent) and short tasks (50 per cent). The short tasks are set by City & Guilds, administered by providers, and moderated by City & Guilds. Portfolios are moderated by City & Guilds. The method of assessment for LCCIEB is a combination of a portfolio and a test (three hours in total, which can be spread over several days). The

test, which is set by LCCIEB and marked internally, can be administered in an informal way. Both the portfolio and the test are externally verified by LCCIEB.

ASDAN's Entry level Certificate in Life Skills is offered at Entry 1, 2 and 3. It consists of six modules, each of which has five sections. The modules cover: citizenship; the community; home management; ICT; personal care; and preparation for working life. The personal care module, for example, has sections on the effects of harmful drugs; health and fitness; healthy eating; personal hygiene; and different roles and responsibilities inside and outside the home. Unit certification is available, but to achieve the full certificate learners have to complete four (of the six) modules successfully. The assessment is a combination of portfolio and externally assessed activities or tasks. The tasks are set by ASDAN, internally supervised and marked, and externally moderated, along with the portfolios. Task (for example, to prepare a meal) can be observed, written up in the portfolio, or both.

City & Guilds Entry level Certificate in Preparation for Employment can be achieved at Entry 2 and 3. Five units are required to achieve at Entry 2, six units at Entry 3. At Entry 2, learners take four mandatory units: life skills; career planning; personal skills; and ICT; plus one optional unit. At Entry 3, the common units are: ICT; career planning; money matters; personal skills; and health and safety at work. The optional units are science (Entry 3 only); team challenge (Entry 2 only); enterprise; introduction to business (Entry 3 only); technology; and language and culture. The award is assessed by a portfolio and an assignment. City & Guilds specify which aspects of the content will be assessed by portfolio and which by assignment. The portfolios and assignments are moderated by City & Guilds.

The Entry level Certificate in Skills for Working Life from Education Development International plc (LCCIEB) is at Entry 2 and 3. It consists of mandatory and optional units. The four mandatory units are: act safely in the workplace (at Entry 3); improve own performance (at Entry 3); work effectively (at Entry 2); communicate effectively (at Entry 2 and 3); find out about myself (at Entry 2); find out about vocational choices (at Entry 2); and work with others (at Entry 3). There is a wide choice of optional units covering: catering; the built environment; hairdressing; horticulture; motor vehicle; retail; administration; and hospitality. The units are assessed through a portfolio, which is externally verified by LCCIEB. The portfolio can include evidence from work placements, together with observations by assessors, witness statements and short assignments.

Entry level awards not in the National Qualifications Framework

The Entry level awards not in the NQF most commonly used were City & Guilds Profile of Achievement (four providers), the Fairbridge Programme (four providers), UK Youth Youth Achievement Award (four providers), ASDAN Youth Award Scheme (three providers) and Weston Spirit (three providers). The City & Guilds Profile of Achievement and the Youth Achievement Award are also available at levels 1 and 2, whilst the Fairbridge Programme can also be achieved at level 1 and the ASDAN Youth Award Scheme goes up to level 3.

The City & Guilds Profile of Achievement helps young people take responsibility for their own learning. Young people establish their own objectives and timescales, which are unique to each learner. There is no pass or fail or prescribed requirements, the Profile being an individualised record of the achievements of that learner. The Profile of Achievement can be used as a foundation for continuing with training or education. The learner's objectives and timescales are negotiated between the

candidate and the internal assessor, and have to be agreed by the City & Guilds external verifier. The portfolio is moderated by City & Guilds.

The Fairbridge Programme's principal focus is on personal and social skill development, independent living skills, work-based skills, recreation and community skills. It also includes communication, problem solving, planning and reviewing learning, working with others and self-awareness. The programme is individually tailored, with a mix of group and individual sessions. Each young person works towards goals they have set themselves in an action planning process, and is awarded certificates on completion of goals. There is no accreditation by Fairbridge, but other bodies such as OCNs, ASDAN and John Muir Awards can be used.

The UK Youth Youth Achievement Award focuses on the development of a range of personal and social skills through participating in a number of accredited Challenges. There are no prescriptive activities, so the award can be used in any setting. The activities are based on young people's interests, concerns and issues, for example creative arts, sports, health, independent living skills. Each Challenge represents at least 15 hours' work, as well as the planning, reviewing and recording of them. The learning outcomes must include: taking responsibility for the planning and delivery of activities; peer education; peer support; monitoring skills; decision-making; and social and cultural awareness. The ownership of the awards sits with the group of young people participating in each programme – the Award Group. This group reviews their peers' portfolios and decides whether individuals have succeeded in their Challenges.

The ASDAN Bronze Youth Award Scheme is a preparatory award that emphasises personal development, independent living skills, citizenship and self-esteem. Communication, working with others, problem solving, planning and reviewing learning, citizenship, employability and self-awareness are all part of the programme. Within the award scheme are 60-hour 'short course awards', which focus on the curriculum areas of: volunteering and community involvement; expressive arts; active citizenship; sports and fitness; work-related training; and residential activity. Each short course award has a checklist of requirements. At least one of these short course awards has to be completed for the Bronze Award at Entry level. The activities in the short course award are recorded in a portfolio, which includes assessor observations and witness statements to show evidence of progression. Portfolios are moderated by ASDAN.

Weston Spirit is accredited by City & Guilds and by Edexcel. The principal focus is on personal development, self-awareness and key skills (especially communication and working with others). Citizenship, employability, planning and reviewing and problem solving are also part of the programme. The City & Guilds Weston Spirit is individually tailored for each young person, each of whom establishes their own objectives and timescales. Negotiated progress through the programme is recorded in a portfolio, which is moderated by City & Guilds. The Edexcel Weston Spirit is a uniquely designed, two-day personal development course involving group work. The young person has to demonstrate evidence of learning during participation on the course, working through group tasks until they are completed. Edexcel verifiers attend the course to confirm the outcomes for each young person.

Provision other than at Entry level

Five providers who did not use Entry level qualifications responded to the questionnaire. Of these, two offered provision only at NVQ level 1. The other providers had not used Entry level awards either because they had no time to research what was available before E2E started; because they wanted an award with which all their learners could succeed; or because they concentrated initially on flexibility and on the development of personal and social skills, with Entry level qualifications being seen as a goal for later progression. As well as NVQs, a range of awards was chosen including the City & Guilds Progression Award, Getting Connected (NYA/NIACE), the OCR National Skills Profile, U-choose (Chrysalis – Club 2000), and AQA certificated units in personal and social development and in employment preparation. Providers thought these awards were more appropriate for the vocational sectors that learners are interested in.

Two providers who used Entry level awards also made use of alternative provision at level 1. One delivered the BTEC Certificate in Entry to Public Services; another delivered Getting Connected.

Most providers were not planning any major changes to their provision in the light of their experience of the Pathfinder phase. However one was introducing Entry level qualifications (not in the NQF) in personal and social development and in some vocational areas, together with the opportunity to gain unit accreditation across a range of life skills. Another provider was going to do some research into Entry level provision when their organisation was fully staffed. One provider was introducing more vocational tasters; and one had introduced a level 1 award instead of NVQ level 2 units (in care) and skills tests instead of the NVQ level 1 (in horticulture). Most of the providers had no views on how Entry level qualifications could be modified because they did not have enough knowledge to make a judgement. One provider emphasised the need to make awards flexible, so that they could mix and match units, and pointed out that learners can see external assessment and formal examinations as a reminder of school where the majority of E2E learners had 'failed'.

Providers were divided on the importance of national standards at Entry level: one thought it very important to have national standards; two thought it was more important to measure distance travelled and participation; two felt that both national standards and distance travelled/participation were important. Three providers said it was helpful to have national qualifications at Entry level, although one of these believed that levels 1 and 2 were more credible and recognised by employers. One provider thought that qualifications at level 1 were more important, while another found that some learners could move straight to level 1 once they had developed their personal and social skills.

One provider would like to have the wider key skills available at Entry level. All the providers agreed that E2E had been a positive experience for their learners. They emphasised the value of the vocational strand of the E2E curriculum, which was often the way to engage learners, motivate them and retain them.

Summary

- Entry level provision was viewed very positively. It was seen as easy to deliver for the providers; and motivating for learners, with good attendance, retention and completion rates.

- Nationally recognised Entry level qualifications were considered essential, even though few providers were using awards in the NQF.
- There was a lack of knowledge about the qualifications structure, about what was available at Entry level – both in the NQF and outside it, and about the status of the awards currently used by providers. This was evidenced by providers' comments requesting types of awards already available, and features within awards (such as no formal examinations) which already exist in the majority of NQF Entry level qualifications.
- Overall, a wide range of awards, from pre-Entry to level 2, was used, but individual providers generally used only a small number. Informal awards focussed on personal and social skills development.
- Providers stressed the importance of the vocational element of E2E, which was the part of the programme that learners found most motivating. The lack of nationally-recognised Entry level and level 1 NVQs in some vocational areas was felt to be a significant shortcoming by those providers whose strength was in this part of the E2E curriculum.
- NVQs were available in a spread of occupational sectors.
- There was little NQF certification of basic skills, or certification of basic skills at all.
- Several providers would like to have the wider key skills available at Entry level.
- Unitisation was seen as particularly useful for learners at this level, so that they could quickly see the progress they were making.
- The availability of national standards and the recording of distance travelled and participation were considered equally important.
- Few providers were planning to make significant changes to their provision.

Recommendations

- Information about Entry level qualifications – both those in the NQF and informal awards – should be made available to targeted groups (for example E2E providers). The information should include a description of the qualification structure: levels, types of awards, and settings.
- Consideration should be given to developing vocational Entry level awards in occupational sectors where they are currently not available.
- Providers should be encouraged to certificate learners' achievements in basic skills. This may mean that tutors/trainers need to develop skills in assessment methods.
- Awarding bodies should be encouraged to offer unit certification, where this is not already available.
- The development of the wider key skills at Entry level should be considered.

Annex 1: Grid of qualifications used by Pathfinder providers

| Qualification/award | <i>Most learners</i> | <i>Some learners</i> | <i>Not used</i> |
|--|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------|
| Informal awards | | | |
| ASDAN Workright | | | |
| ASDAN Youth Award Scheme (bronze, silver or gold) | | | |
| The Duke of Edinburgh's Award | | | |
| Fairbridge Programme | | | |
| Getting Connected | | | |
| The Trident Trust Skills for Life | | | |
| Youth Achievement Award | | | |
| City and Guilds Profile of Achievement | | | |
| Weston Spirit – Edexcel Profile of Achievement | | | |
| Young Mums to Be Award | | | |
| Drug awareness | | | |
| NVQ units at level 1 (indicate areas of learning) | | | |
| Land-based programmes | | | |
| Construction | | | |
| Engineering | | | |
| Business | | | |
| ICT | | | |
| Retailing and transportation | | | |
| Hospitality, travel and leisure | | | |
| Care and public services | | | |
| Visual and performing arts | | | |
| Hair and beauty | | | |
| National Qualification Framework | | | |
| Entry levels (accredited by QCA) | | | |
| GNVQs | | | |
| Applied GCSEs | | | |
| Key skills units | | | |
| Basic skills qualifications | | | |
| Other Entry level qualifications – please specify | | | |
| Other qualifications and awards (please give examples, such as forklift truck driving, first aid, and so on). | | | |

Annex 2: Questions for providers using Entry level qualifications

| | | | |
|----------------------------|------------------------|---------------------------------|--|
| Name of Pathfinder | | Date of interview | |
| Name of provider | | Type of provider | |
| Type of interview | Telephone/face-to-face | | |
| Name of interviewee | | Job title of interviewee | |

| | |
|---|---------------|
| 1. Why did you choose the Entry level qualification(s)? What are their titles? Are they accredited by QCA? | Analysis code |
| | |

| | |
|--|---------------|
| 2. Did it have a motivating effect on the learners (did they turn up for the sessions/did they complete all the requirements of the qualification/did they engage in the learning)? | Analysis code |
| | |

| | |
|---|---------------|
| 3. Did it help the learners to progress to (or towards) the goal for which they were aiming (eg employment or a further course)? Where did they progress to? | Analysis code |
| | |

| | |
|---|---------------|
| 4. Was it an easy programme to deliver (in terms of resources, time, evidence requirements, flexibility...)? | Analysis code |
| | |

| | |
|--|---------------|
| 5. What were the overall completion rates for those taking the Entry level qualification? | Analysis code |
| | |

| | |
|---|---------------|
| 6. How did it compare to other awards used/other learning programmes followed in terms of meeting learners needs/interests, motivating learners, helping them to progress? | Analysis code |
| | |

| | |
|---|---------------|
| 7. Are you planning to change your use of Entry level qualifications in the light of your experience in the Pathfinder phase? If so, in what ways and why? | Analysis code |
| | |

| | |
|--|---------------|
| 8. Is there a place for nationally recognised Entry level qualifications in the E2E framework? What – if any – changes would be needed to make them more appropriate (eg smaller/different approach to assessment/other areas of learning not currently available)? | Analysis code |
| | |

| | |
|---|---------------|
| 9. How important do you think it is for learners to be working towards national standards at this level? Is it more or less important to measure distance travelled/record participation in an activity? | Analysis code |
| | |

| | |
|---|---------------|
| 10. Is it helpful to have national qualifications at this level or would programmes of learning which prepare learners for qualifications at level 1 and beyond be more appropriate? | Analysis code |
| | |

Additional comments

Annex 3: Questions for providers not using Entry level qualifications

| | | | |
|----------------------------|------------------------|---------------------------------|--|
| Name of Pathfinder | | Date of interview | |
| Name of provider | | Type of provider | |
| Type of interview | Telephone/face-to-face | | |
| Name of interviewee | | Job title of interviewee | |

| | |
|---|---------------|
| 1. Why did you choose not to use Entry level qualifications? Were there particular features of the provision that made them inappropriate? | Analysis code |
| | |

| | |
|---|---------------|
| 2. What did you use instead and why? What were the particular features of the provision you used that made it appropriate to the learners? | Analysis code |
| | |

| | |
|--|---------------|
| 3. Are you planning to change your provision in the light of your experience in the Pathfinder phase? If so, why? Might your provision now include Entry level qualifications? (<i>Describe Entry provision available.</i>) If so, why? | Analysis code |
| | |

| | |
|---|---------------|
| 4. Do you think that Entry level qualifications could be modified so that they are useful in E2E programmes? What changes would be necessary? Would a wider range of qualifications be required? | Analysis code |
| | |

| | |
|---|---------------|
| 5. How important do you think it is for learners to be working towards national standards at this level? Is it more or less important to measure distance travelled/record participation in an activity? | Analysis code |
| | |

| | |
|--|---------------|
| 6. Is it helpful to have national qualifications at this level or would programmes of learning which prepare learners for qualifications at level 1 and beyond be more appropriate? | Analysis code |
| | |

Additional comments

Appendix 6: Questionnaire

Evaluation of Entry level qualifications

This questionnaire refers solely to Entry level qualifications that have been accredited into the National Qualifications Framework.

Please return to Francesca Dowler at QCA, 83 Piccadilly, London W1J 8QA by 16th December 2003

1. Name of centre.....

2. Job title of respondent

3. Address.....

4. Type of centre

- Secondary school
- Special school
- Independent special school
- Pupil referral unit
- General further education college
- Specialist college (eg dance and drama; agriculture)
- Sixth form college
- Independent specialist college for students with learning difficulties/disabilities
- Training provider
- Other (please state)

5. How many learners at your centre are currently following programmes leading to an Entry level qualification? Please tick one box only.

- 0 (If none, please state the year Entry level qualifications were last offered and the number of learners who followed the programmes in that year)

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- 1-5
- 6-15
- 16-25
- 26-50
- 51-100
- More than 100 (please state how many).....

6. How many of the learners are working at each Entry sub-level? Please estimate if you do not know exactly.

Entry 1

Entry 2

Entry 3

7. Which types of Entry level qualifications are the learners working towards or have learners taken over the past three years? Please tick all relevant boxes.

- National curriculum subjects or titles relating to corresponding GCSEs
- Literacy and numeracy
- ESOL
- Life skills, including personal development
- General preparation for employment including skills for working life
- Discrete vocational areas (such as catering)
- Other (please state)

8. Why do teachers in your centre choose Entry level qualifications for learners? Please tick all relevant boxes.

- Teachers think they match learners' needs
- Teachers think they are relevant to learners' real lives and likely next destinations
- Teachers think they increase the self-esteem or self-confidence of learners
- Teachers believe that they are required for funding purposes
- Teachers believe that they are required in order to do well in inspection
- Teachers think they help learners make the transition to employment or training
- Teachers think they help learners make the transition to college
- Learners value and want them
- Parents/carers want the learners to take them
- Employers value them
- Other reason (please state)

.....
.....

9. Entry level qualifications were introduced to encourage achievement among a wider range of learners than before. Please tick all the ways in which Entry level qualifications have encouraged achievement.

- They help to keep in learning those who might previously have dropped out
- They help to keep in employment those who might previously have dropped out
- They provide opportunities to gain nationally recognised qualifications for learners who would not have had them previously
- They offer a clear framework for progression within and through the Entry sub-levels and on to level 1
- They help to motivate learners
- They have not encouraged the achievement of a wider range of learners

Other reason (please state)

.....
.....

10. If you think that Entry level qualifications have not encouraged the achievement of some learners working at Entry level, please tick the reasons why you think this is the case.

- Some learners have more pressing needs than gaining national qualifications
- There are better ways to assist some learners into work or college
- Not all learners are motivated by qualifications
- Some learners are excluded because of the approaches to assessment used in the Entry level qualifications
- The range of Entry level qualifications is too narrow
- Entry level qualifications have encouraged the learning of all those working at Entry level
- Other reason (please state)

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11. Do you consider that the following types of learners are well served by Entry level qualifications? Please tick all relevant boxes.

- 14–16 year-olds
- 16–19 year-olds
- adults
- learners with MLD
- learners with SLD
- learners with PMLD
- disaffected learners
- learners with EBD
- learners with mental health problems or complex social needs
- other types (please state)

For any types of learners that you do *not* think are well served by Entry level qualifications, please state your reasons.

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12. How do Entry level qualifications help learners at your centre to progress? Please tick all relevant boxes.

- Further learning/qualifications at the same Entry sub-level
- Further learning/qualifications at a higher Entry sub-level
- Further learning/qualifications at level 1 or above
- Moving into employment (including supported employment)
- Moving into training
- Moving into independent living
- Other form of progression (please explain)

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- The learners do not use the qualifications to help their progression (please explain why this is the case)

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13. How do you think Entry level qualifications improve the learning of those working below level 1 of the National Qualifications Framework? Please tick all relevant boxes.

- They help learners achieve targets in their individual learning plans
- They help learners achieve their ambitions
- They help learners decide what to do next
- They add pace and rigour to teaching
- They help teachers structure learning programmes that better match learners' abilities, interests, and needs
- They help teachers to raise their expectations of what learners can achieve
- Other ways (please state)

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- They do not improve learning (please explain)

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14. How do you think Entry level qualifications can have a detrimental effect on learning? Please tick all relevant boxes.

- Sometimes teachers can miss learners' real needs if they teach towards an Entry level qualification
- There is too much emphasis on assessment

- There is too much focus on national standards instead of measuring distance travelled or progress made
- Paperwork can take too much time and distract teachers from teaching
- Teachers think that the awarding body requirements are not sufficiently flexible (please explain what these constraints are)

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- Other ways (please state)

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15. Assessment and recording of achievement

15a. According to teachers in your centre, for which of the following areas of learning do Entry level qualifications offer a suitable means of assessing and recording achievement? Please tick all relevant boxes.

- National curriculum subjects or titles relating to corresponding GCSEs
- Literacy and numeracy
- ESOL
- Life skills, including personal development
- General preparation for employment including skills for working life
- Discrete vocational areas (such as catering)
- Other (please state)

15b. For any areas of learning where you do *not* think an Entry level qualification provides a suitable means of assessment and recording, please state your reasons.

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15c. What types of assessment and recording would be more appropriate to those areas of learning that you have identified as unsuitable for Entry level qualifications? Please tick all relevant boxes.

- Proprietary award (such as City & Guilds Profile of Achievement or ASDAN Youth Award)
- Centre-based award
- Locally devised award
- Portfolio of work
- Record of Achievement/Progress File
- Other (please state)

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16. Entry level qualifications must contain at least 50 per cent external assessment in the case of national curriculum subjects, ICT, literacy and numeracy, and at least 40 per cent in all other areas of learning. Do you consider the proportion of external assessment currently required to be

- Too little
- The right amount
- Too much

Please give reasons for your answer

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17. Quality assurance and quality control

17a. In the view of teachers in your centre, what aspects of quality assurance and quality control have improved with the introduction of Entry level qualifications?

- Advice from external verifiers and other awarding body representatives
- General advice and guidance from QCA/DfES or other central bodies, not specific to any particular qualification or awarding body
- Approaches to assessment
- Standard of training for internal and external verifiers
- Integrity of awards
- Consistency of standards between awarding bodies
- Clarity of standards
- Level of rigour
- Level of flexibility to meet individual needs
- No areas
- Other areas (please state)

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17b. Please indicate which areas need improving

- Advice from external verifiers and other awarding body representatives
- General advice and guidance from QCA/DfES or other central bodies, not specific to any particular qualification or awarding body
- Approaches to assessment
- Standard of training for internal and external verifiers
- Integrity of awards
- Consistency of standards between awarding bodies

- Clarity of standards
- Level of rigour
- Level of flexibility to meet individual needs
- No areas
- Other areas (please state)

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18. Has the inclusion of Entry level in the National Qualifications Framework resulted in:

- More certainty about the level of each Entry level qualification
- Better understanding of the relationship between Entry level qualifications and qualifications at other levels of the framework
- Better understanding of the standards required at each Entry sub-level across different subjects
- None of the above
- Other improvements in teacher understanding of external awards at this level (please explain)

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Please use the space below to provide any additional comments about Entry level qualifications. Please feel free either to expand on your answers within the questionnaire (in which case cross-reference your comments to the questions) or to add any further thoughts.

If you would be interested in contributing further to this evaluation project or taking part in a follow-up interview please fill in your details in the box below.

Contact name:

Address (if different from that on page 1):

Telephone number:

E-mail address: