

Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) Funding Parameters Guidance

Adult Learner Responsive – Version 2

21 May 2010

Audience details: External

Background and Purpose

1. This document sets out the details of what will be funded within the Adult Learner Responsive offer, commencing with the policy intent of the programme, the scope of the offer and identifying the technical funding parameters which Sector Skills Councils (SSCs), Standard Setting Bodies (SSBs), Sector Bodies (SBs) and awarding organisations (AOs) should work within. Also included in this document, is the Skills Funding Agency (Agency) approach to setting funding values for qualifications approved for public funding. This document should be read in conjunction with the general guidance on technical parameters.

Policy Intent

2. Adult Learner Responsive (ALR) provision covers learners on eligible provision who are aged 19 or over on the 31st August of the funding year in which they start a specific episode of learning. ALR provision is what was previously branded Further Education (FE) adult provision, which was defined as including vocational, social, physical and recreational training, where the means of delivery could be full or part-time. It is the vocational component of the offer that SSCs/SSBs/SBs are being asked to advise upon.
3. Vocational Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) qualifications confirmed for public funding in ALR do not have to meet a specific occupational competence threshold. They must be Certificate and/or Diploma at Level 2 and a Diploma at Level 3 and, in the main, Award and Certificate at Levels 1 and 4. The identification of a credit threshold for occupational competence is not applicable in ALR as; in the main, vocational qualifications in ALR are about knowledge and skills for a particular vocation rather than a specific occupational area.
4. In order to differentiate for providers and employers between qualifications that provide occupational competence and the broader offer in ALR, we are characterising those in ALR as qualifications which are developmental in nature in the sense of developing the underpinning knowledge and skills in a vocational context and/or delivering opportunities for progression. In contrast, qualifications that provide the complete range of skills to meet the total occupational competence threshold are defined as competence qualifications.
5. The published list of fundable qualifications will identify qualifications as either developmental or competence to enable providers to clearly identify which represents the most appropriate solution for learners. This distinction is critically important to ensure that learners receive the right skills for their intended objectives. Crucially, those needing the skills to meet occupational competence thresholds for employment must be offered the specific qualifications that represent competence, not those intended to offer developmental learning only.
6. In ALR qualifications therefore attest to a broader context of vocational knowledge and progression. However, it is still the expectation that vocational qualifications in ALR should relate to the appropriate National Occupational Standards (NOS).
7. Where a qualification has already been confirmed for funding as target bearing within Train to Gain (i.e. meeting the threshold for occupational competence) and

the sector body can confirm the qualification can be delivered in a realistic working environment, the Agency will consider these qualifications for funding under ALR with sector body support. These qualifications must be supported by the relevant threshold template for Train to Gain and will be classified as competence qualifications.

Scope of the Offer

8. ALR provision supports a wide range of activity from supporting adults engaged in learning for the first time to gain basic skills to help them get on in life, through to adults needing to retrain as a result of losing their job and adults seeking to progress to higher level skills or to higher education.
9. The total ALR offer falls into the following core groupings:
10. Foundation Learning Entry and Level 1 (excluding Skills for Life)
 - Skills for Life
 - Target bearing Level 2
 - Target bearing Level 3
 - Level 4 and 5
 - Developmental Learning
11. From the 2010/11 academic year the Foundation Learning Tier will be replaced by the **Foundation Learning Curriculum**, offering a framework to help adults progress ultimately to Level 2. The Foundation Learning Curriculum, which includes formal First Step learning, will be built on a clear analysis of individuals' needs to ensure they receive the mix of skills that is right for them to promote confidence in learning, minimal occupational competence, employability and independent living. It will be constructed to help learners and providers to identify personalised learning programmes to address their learning and skills gaps by drawing from the following three skill sets:
 - Functional skills in English, Mathematics and ICT (not yet in the QCF)
 - Vocational training
 - Personal and social development skills
12. It is expected that SSCs/SSBs/SBs will advise the Agency on the most suitable and fit for purpose *vocational* provision which should be considered within this offer.
13. In identifying vocational qualifications for inclusion in the Foundation Learning Tier SSCs/SSBs/SBs must take account of the Agency's guidance on the Foundation Learning curriculum for adults:
[http://readingroom.skillsfundingagency.bis.gov.uk/sfa/Adult_FLC - presentation - April 2010.ppt](http://readingroom.skillsfundingagency.bis.gov.uk/sfa/Adult_FLC_-_presentation_-_April_2010.ppt)
14. For adults aged 19 or over **Skills for Life** qualifications are available to help individuals develop the skills used in everyday life such as reading, writing or maths. As there is no vocational offer within Skills for Life there is no role for SSCs/SSBs/SBs to advise the Agency of qualifications within this offer.
15. The Skills Investment Strategy gave a clear steer that Target Bearing **Level 2 and 3** qualifications will continue to be supported and the vast majority of these qualifications will be linked to a specific sector.

ALR Technical Funding Parameters

16. The technical parameters to be followed by SSCs/SSBs/SBs when recommending vocational qualifications in the QCF to be considered for funding in ALR are set out below. It is acknowledged there will on occasion be legitimate exceptions to these. Where this is the case a clear written rationale must be provided for consideration by the Agency.

Volume of learning and challenge

17. Target bearing qualifications at Levels 2 and 3:
 - a. Target bearing qualifications at Level 2 should be Certificates and/or Diplomas. Where the same Level 2 qualification exists at Certificate and Diploma size, if an SSC/SSB/SB requests that both be confirmed as target bearing, this will be accepted in Adult Learner Responsive provision (but not in Train to Gain). This will allow some of the flexibilities of the QCF to begin to be delivered, and is on the understanding that, firstly, a learner who completes the Certificate would only subsequently be funded for the necessary additional components to complete the Diploma; and, secondly, where a learner registers for the Diploma but does not complete it, assuming they have achieved the credit value of the Certificate, they will gain that qualification.
 - b. Target bearing qualifications at Level 3 should be Diplomas. Certificates will be considered where a Certificate is the agreed competency qualification in Train to Gain and where it can be delivered in a realistic working environment.
 - c. As indicated above, qualifications which confirm occupational competence and appear within Train to Gain must have a credit value equal to the agreed Train to Gain credit threshold
 - d. For ALR it is expected that SSCs/SSBs/SBs will identify individual vocational qualifications (irrespective of Train to Gain credit thresholds) at Certificate and/or Diploma at Level 2 and Diploma at Level 3 which are of value to the sector in terms of the knowledge and skills they contain and the progression opportunities they support.
18. Entry, Level 1, Level 4 or Level 5 qualifications within Adult Learner Responsive provision will not have any size restrictions, although in the main it is expected these qualifications will be in the Award and Certificate band at Entry and Level 1. This will be reviewed in December 2010.

Qualification Purpose

19. Vocational target-bearing qualifications at Level 2 and 3:
 - Should in general have a primary purpose of 'B' (Prepare for further learning or training and/or develop knowledge and/or skills in a subject area) and 'C' (Prepare for employment)
 - Qualifications with a purpose of 'D' (Confirm occupational competence) can be included where assessment can be carried out in a realistic working environment. Where these qualifications are offered, they should be the qualifications already confirmed in Train to Gain and be supported by a threshold template

20. Vocational qualifications offered as part of Foundation learning should in the main be at Level 1:
- A4 (Recognise development of employability skills and/or knowledge)
 - B (Prepare for further learning or training and/or develop knowledge and/or skills in a subject area)
 - C1 (Prepare for employment in a broad occupational area).
 - D1 (Confirm competence in an occupational role to the standards required) may be appropriate
 - In some cases there will be vocational qualifications at Entry Level and these may be aligned to purpose A4 (Recognise development of employability skills) but the Agency acknowledges that in some cases purposes B1 (Prepare for further learning or training) and C (Prepare for employment) may also be considered
21. Level 4 and 5 qualifications may be aligned to:
- 'B' (Prepare for further learning or training and/or develop knowledge and/or skills in a subject area)
 - 'D' (Confirm occupational competence) where this can be delivered in a realistic working environment

Process and Timescales

22. The Agency will only accept advice from SSCs/SSBs/SBs via the Action Plan database. Sector bodies must ensure the database is updated regularly and accurately to permit a timely response.
23. SSCs/SSBs/SBs must ensure that the Action Plan database is completed correctly, including all fields and that where more than one AO offers the qualification, all AOs are referenced.
24. It is essential that the Skills Funding Agency can clearly identify whether the qualification represents developmental or competence learning as described in paragraphs 4 and 5 above. The SSCs/SSB/SBs must ensure that the ALR funding flag is completed correctly on the action plan database.
25. Once approved for funding through the Agency's funding approval process and confirmed by the Strategic Approvals Panel the qualification will be added to the published list of approved qualifications. This list will be a 'live' list and will be available on the Agency website; the list will be updated on a fortnightly basis from April to December 2010.
26. Where an SSC/SSB/SB identifies a qualification which needs to be considered as an exception to the identified parameters a written case must be put forward to the Agency Sector Manager setting out the rationale for the recommendation. This will then be considered and a final decision made by the Strategic Approvals Panel.

Approach to Setting Funding Values

27. Qualifications approved for public funding will be set funding values (Standard Learner Numbers (SLN)).
28. The principle behind the Agency's funding is that the rate paid reflects the directly incurred cost of efficiently delivered provision. Guided learning hours (glh) are used as the measure of costs incurred for Adult Learner Responsive provision. (Learning and Skills Council Funding Guidance 2008/09: Principles, Rules and Regulations paragraphs 20 and 21).
29. In order to set fair and appropriate funding values, the Agency needs to know the following information:
 - Primary and secondary purpose, as a proxy for mode of delivery of the qualification (either classroom or workplace based, or a mix of the two), to determine its relative size (source UKCES)
 - glh (which is a sub-set of the qualification's learning time) or credit value (source Ofqual)
 - Number of pathways available within a qualification, to determine the SLN/SLN glh value when the recommended glh covers a range (source Ofqual)
 - LearnDirect Classification System (LDCS code) (source the Data Service) or Sector Subject Area (SSA) classification Tiers 1 and 2 (source Ofqual) or 'sub-sector' (source UKCES), to determine the programme weighting factor
 - Predecessor qualification(s) to maintain consistency in the funding where the QCF version is the same as its predecessor. This information also helps in setting programme weighting factors, where exceptions to the LDCS or SSA classification are not effectively captured when replacement qualifications are introduced (source UKCES or individual search)

Annex 1: - Frequently Asked Questions

Question: What is the Agency's rationale for supporting Certificate or Diploma under L2 but only Diploma provision at L3 in Adult Learner Responsive?

Answer: In November 2009 the National Skills Strategy indicated a direction of travel that target bearing qualifications at Level 2 should be in the Diploma or Certificate band and target bearing qualifications at Level 3 should be in the Diploma band. At Level 3, certainly in the context of broader vocational qualifications, it is important to build in the opportunity and capacity to progress to higher education and higher level skills. Through the evaluation on the interim definitions of Level 2 and 3 the Agency has commissioned we will review the move towards the Certificate and Diploma band widths. .

Question: Will the Agency fund an Award under ALR at L2 or L3 if it has been approved for funding under Train to Gain (TTG)?

Answer: For an interim period until 2011 we will consider funding an Award in ALR at Level 2 where it has already been identified in Train to Gain and Confirms occupational competence, and can be delivered in a realistic working environment. For Level 3 we will seek to review the rationale. But by 2011 we intend across Train to Gain and in ALR to focus on the National Skills Strategy band widths for Level 2 and 3

Question: What is informal learning and where does it fit in? What is the split between ALR and Informal Learning?

Answer: In the main Informal adult learning is provision which is not formally accredited or formally regulated. Within ALR there is a safeguard which protects that learning informal and non formal learning. Informal and non formal adult learning is not within the remit of SSCs. The Agency has identified that it wishes to manage down the amount of non accredited provision which the Agency funds. It has been agreed that by January 2011 the Agency will notify providers of the turning off of non accredited provision

Question: What is the size limit at Level 5 in ALR?

Answer: There is currently no upper size limit in this area. However, because a qualification is fundable does not mean that the Agency will fund it. This will be dependent on availability of funding and employer contribution. Generally we would not expect Diplomas at Level 5 as larger higher level qualifications tend to be prescribed Higher Education which are not fundable by the Agency

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