

Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF)

QCF and the Personal Learning Record fact sheet March 2010

This fact sheet presents a high-level overview of the changes being made to the Managing Information Across Partners (MIAP) Personal Learning Record to support the additional services around credit accumulation and transfer for the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF), together with the benefits this will offer. This fact sheet is aimed at learners, providers, advisers, awarding organisations and other stakeholders interacting with the QCF and the Personal Learning Record.

What is the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF)?

The Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) is a new way of recognising achievement through the award of credit for the achievement of units and qualifications. The QCF provides a simple and rational organising framework that presents learner achievement and qualifications in a way that is easy to understand, measure and compare. It gives individuals the opportunity to learn in a more flexible way and enables a wider range of organisations, including employers, to have their training recognised. The QCF is a key strand of the Government's Vocational Qualification Reform (VQR) Programme. The Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and its successor organisation the Skills Funding Agency are responsible for implementing the QCF across the wider post 19 skills system in England, and for delivering the changes made to the Personal Learning Record to support the additional QCF services which will operate in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

What changes are we making to support QCF on the Personal Learning Record?

The set of changes to the Personal Learning Record (available from September 2010) will underpin the operation of the QCF by offering a simple facility to record all QCF learner achievement. This free service is intended to empower the learner to view and review their learning and support them in making the right learning choices in the context of the QCF. The learner will be able to view all of their QCF achievement data, on-line, and in one place. Used as part of robust and professional information and advice, the Personal Learning Record will also offer the option of supporting learners to identify potential future QCF learning episodes through Rules of Combination (RoC), Routes to Achievement (RtA) using information sourced from the regulators, as well as opportunities to transfer achievement. QCF achievement data will be collected directly from awarding organisations and held on the Personal Learning Record, with awarding organisations continuing to hold and own authoritative achievement data. Providers and advisers will also support the learner to access and interpret their QCF achievement data via the Personal Learning Record, and will play a critical role in assigning and verifying learners' Unique Learner Numbers (ULNs).

The new services which will be offered by the Personal Learning Record are important tools in facilitating the delivery of the full flexibility and benefits of the QCF. Although Credit Accumulation and Transfer (CAT) can happen without reference to the Personal Learning Record, the data in the Personal Learning Record will support the accumulation and transfer of achievement for all vocational qualifications within the QCF from awarding organisations that choose to use this service and are recognised to operate in the QCF. This will be realised

through greater transparency of achievement data held in a secure environment, minimising bureaucracy and making QCF the framework of choice for employers, learners and providers.

What QCF content will be held on the Personal Learning Record?

QCF information held on the Personal Learning Record will be in the form of the ULN (with supporting identifiers), endorsed titles (where applicable) and QCF credit and qualification achievement data, correct at the time it was submitted by the creators and owners of the data, the awarding organisations. The Personal Learning Record does not replace the formal certificate of achievement, but is a source of useful information to support learners in their decision making. Awarding organisations are the authoritative source of the data supplied to the Personal Learning Record and they alone can amend achievement data if required; furthermore, awarding organisations are the only organisations that can award credit and qualifications.

Providers and advisers will ensure that learners are assigned a Unique Learner Number (ULN), and will support them to identify and verify their ULN throughout their learning career. Awarding organisations will be dependent on providers to verify the ULN and include it in data submitted to them. The ULN will be a prerequisite for the collection of data.

How will QCF achievement data on the Personal Learning Record be used?

QCF achievement data on the Personal Learning Record will not be aggregated and used for purposes other than LSC data maintenance and quality control, defined and agreed in operating agreements with awarding organisations. The LSC / Skills Funding Agency will work with awarding organisations to verify and agree how QCF achievement data on the Personal Learning Record will be accessed. Furthermore, as with all its handling of data, the LSC / Skills Funding Agency will rigorously comply with Data Protection laws. The LSC is responsible for the security of the system and for ensuring the protection of the data against corruption within the Personal Learning Record.

Learners control access to their Personal Learning Record and to data within it, but cannot change the data (although they can challenge the data for accuracy). Awarding organisations will provide the definitive and authoritative source of evidence of achievement. QCF achievement data on the Personal Learning Record will not in that sense be 'definitive', but it will be accurate, and appropriate checks and balances will be put in place as part of operating agreements and joint ways of working, to ensure that the data on the Personal Learning Record is consistent with that held by the awarding organisation.

When will these changes to the Personal Learning Record become available?

The changes to the Personal Learning Record to support the additional services around credit accumulation and transfer for the QCF are being delivered in two phases:

- Phase one; Transition Service (April 2009 – September 2010)
- Phase two: full integration with the Personal Learning Record (September 2010 onwards).

Phase One: Transition Service

This phase, currently in operation, focuses on providing an optional service for awarding organisations to ensure that there are processes and technology in place to enable the submission of QCF achievement data to the Personal Learning Record from September 2010. Where appropriate, this first phase is also supporting credit accumulation. The Transition Service however is not available through the Personal Learning Record.

A number of improvements have been made to facilitate achievement data transfer between awarding organisations and the Transition Service Learning Record based on feedback to date.

Based on this feedback, Release 3 of the Transition Service went live in September 2009, offering the enhanced functionality around MIAP/ULN validation and additional reporting capability. Also, real achievement data from participating awarding organisations has been submitted to test the full functionality of the live system.

The QCF Transition Service Release 3 is the last planned release before the changes are made to the Personal Learning Record in September 2010 to support the additional services around credit accumulation and transfer for QCF. Awarding organisations can join the Transition Service on a voluntary basis. Those providers who work with awarding organisations using the Personal Learning Record can use the Transition Service to see their learners' achievement during this phase and they will be able to support learners to view their achievement data.

Phase Two: full integration with the Personal Learning Record

From September 2010, the changes implemented to the Personal Learning Record will provide enhanced QCF functionality and information for learners, as well as other organisations learners choose to give access to their information. The LSC will provide guidance prior to September 2010 to support stakeholders to use this enhanced functionality, with the changes focusing on the additional functions required to facilitate credit transfer where learners choose to use this.

The intention is that the additional functionality will include:

- ability for learners to have direct access to their QCF achievement data and enable them to review progress towards a particular qualification
- ability for learners to manage access to their QCF achievement data by learning providers, careers advisers, awarding organisations, employers and other approved third parties, through a permissions model consistent with a best practice data sharing framework
- ability for learners, providers, as well as awarding organisations that choose to use this service, to submit Rules of Combination (RoC) queries, viewing the combination of credits required for a particular QCF qualification to be awarded
- ability to view potential future learning pathways based on what learners have already achieved by running a Routes to Achievement (RtA) query and to consider these in the context of support from robust and professional information and advice. This is an optional function of the Personal Learning Record, enabling learners (or other third party granted delegated access) to explore the ways in which they could transfer their credit achievements towards obtaining a QCF qualification
- availability of a streamlined Credit Accumulation and Transfer (CAT) functionality for all vocational qualifications within the QCF for awarding organisations that choose to use this service
- additional functionality enabling learners in Wales to be able to access a Welsh language version
- ability for awarding organisations to provide a wider range of achievement data, not limited to QCF, if they wish to do so.

With whom are the LSC consulting to help develop the QCF functionality of the Personal Learning Record?

The LSC has been holding workshops in England, Wales and Northern Ireland with awarding organisations, a range of learning providers and careers advisers. These workshops will continue through until spring 2010 to ensure that stakeholders have enough support and information to use the full functionality in the timescales given, and are able to input into requirements. The National Learner Panel has also been consulted on a number of key issues in respect of the changes to the Personal Learning Record. Ongoing, five day a week support for QCF queries is available through the dedicated LSC QCF Service Desk (details overleaf).

The LSC has also held discussions with the Federation of Awarding Bodies (FAB), the Joint Council for General Qualifications (JCQ) and a small, representative group of awarding organisations to take forward the work around the use of QCF achievement data on the Personal Learning Record.

What are the benefits of using the enhanced QCF services on the Personal Learning Record?

Learners	Awarding organisations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased ability to manage more granular achievement • It provides a source of QCF achievement data for credits and qualifications and evidence of achievement (with awarding organisations holding the authoritative source) • It provides evidence of QCF achievement that can be shown to employers, advisers and providers as and when they see fit • An optional function to identify potential future QCF learning episodes through RoC and RtA. 	<p>Whilst awarding organisations are already able to do some or all of the below in some capacity, the change to the Personal Learning Record offer the following functionality in one place:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quicker and cleaner secured access to learners' QCF achievement data • a single source of information about learners' achievements which can support information and advice • An optional function to identify potential future QCF learning episodes through RoC and RtA.
Employers and other third parties	Providers and careers advisers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trusted restricted access to achievement information about staff and potential staff where access is granted. 	<p>N.B. Learners control access to their Personal Learning Record and to data within it. Providers/advisers given access can get:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved access to learners' QCF achievement data • Further information about learners' achievements via the Personal Learning Record • An optional function to identify potential future QCF learning episodes through RoC and RtA.

What is the link between the changes to the Personal Learning Record and other MIAP services?

MIAP simplifies the way that information about learners, education and training organisations is collected, handled and shared. Services include:

- The Learner Registration Service incorporating a Unique Learner Number (ULN) for every person from age 14 in education and training in the UK. This service enables individuals to access a lifelong Personal Learning Record of their learning participation and achievements, which they can securely share with learning providers and potential employers. The ULN is critical to the functioning of the Personal Learning Record. The Transition Service requires the use of a ULN, thus a ULN is requested from MIAP during this phase
- The UK Register of Learning Providers, containing details of the legal entities of training organisations in the UK. This will be enhanced to support identification of centres approved by awarding organisations.

Further information and support available

LSC QCF website: <http://qfr.lsc.gov.uk/qcfs/> - a store of support documentation on the QCF

MIAP website: www.miap.gov.uk

LSC QCF Service Desk (a dedicated helpdesk for QCF queries):

- tel: 0870 2670054 (8.00am-6.00pm weekdays excluding public holidays)
- or email: qcfservicedesk@lsc.gov.uk