

Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF)

Interim Definition of Full Level 3 Qualifications

Guidance for Awarding Organisations

June 2009

This document is of interest to Awarding
Organisations

Further information

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Guidance for Awarding Organisations (AOs) regarding the interim full Level 3 definition and confirmation process in the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF)

1. This guidance has been developed to assist Awarding Organisations to understand the criteria Sector Skills Councils (SSCs) / Standard Setting Bodies (SSBs) / Sector Bodies (SBs) will use when setting full Level 3 threshold for their sector, sub-sectors and occupations, and to identify key considerations that will need to be taken into account when designing new full Level 3 qualifications in the QCF.

2. The Secretary of State has agreed an interim definition for full Level 3 set as a credit threshold range of a minimum threshold of 25 credits and a maximum threshold of 70 credits for QCF provision. The interim definition will be implemented for the 2-year period to 31 August 2010. LSC will monitor, manage and evaluate this definition during this period. SSCs/SSBs/SBs will be able to vary the thresholds to ensure that the resulting qualification confers a basis for occupational competence and 'licence to practice' and/or progression to higher education and higher level skills in a sector, sub-sector or occupation.

3. As part of the implementation of the interim definition, LSC expects that SSCs/SSBs/SBs and AOs will work closely together. Collaborative working will be essential to ensure that vocational qualifications approved as full Level 3 in the QCF meet the needs of employers and learners. We expect that SSCs/SSBs/SBs will be communicating decisions on sector thresholds with Awarding Organisations to enable them to develop qualifications that can populate the QCF. LSC will continue to work with Awarding Organisations through the Awarding Organisations' Advisory Group and has made a commitment to the Federation of Awarding Bodies (FAB) and to the Joint Council for General Qualifications (JCQ) to ensure early dissemination of SSCs/SSBs/SBs' decisions.

4. As already stated, as part of the wider implementation of the QCF and vocational qualification reform, LSC will be using the Sector Qualification Strategy Action Plans (SQS APs) to inform funding eligibility decisions, and SSCs will advise LSC on which key vocational qualifications should be funded¹. In the context of full Level 3, LSC will be reviewing the funding priorities to take account of the new interim definition to ensure public funding is supporting the right provision. In the context of the interim definition of full Level 3, LSC will be encouraging providers to deliver these qualifications as they become available and seek to switch funding away from National Qualification Framework provision (NQF).

5. LSC has been remitted to monitor and manage implementation of the definition and in particular to manage affordability. LSC will therefore need to understand the changes in relation to the previous full Level 3 NQF qualifications in terms of affordability, and the way learners and employers might be affected.

¹ Please note that funding rates for qualifications are determined by the input and therefore not all full Level 2 qualifications will be funded at the same rate. The funding rate is likely to differentiate between qualifications by their mode of delivery, cost and input required.

6. The table below sets out key considerations that should be taken into account by SSCs/SSBs/SBs in order to meet key full Level 3 approval requirements and which AOs should also be aware of in developing new full level 3 qualifications for the QCF:

Category	Considerations
Content and sector fit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The full Level 3 credit threshold for sectors, sub-sectors and occupations will be determined by SSCs/SSBs/SBs and aligned to National Occupational Standards (NOS), which will be approved/endorsed by employers. It is expected NOS will be a reference point for all provision. ▪ The full Level 3 threshold will also align with the relevant SQSs and Action Plans, therefore ensuring the skills, knowledge and understanding that provide a occupational competence/licence to practice and/or progression to higher education and higher level skills in the sectors, sub-sectors or occupations. ▪ The full Level 3 credit thresholds will have to be comparable among SSCs with similar footprints, and aligned if there are allied occupations. ▪ SSCs/SSBs/SBs should consult with Awarding Organisations, and/or key employers and professional bodies, when establishing requirements for full Level 3 content and thresholds. ▪ LSC will monitor information regarding predecessor qualifications in order to understand the implications for existing qualifications, and safeguard against adverse consequences such as reduction in size solely to meet the minimum full Level 3 threshold. ▪ LSC will also monitor other quality indicators - e.g. professional endorsements, quality standards obtained etc.
Sufficient threshold	<p>SSCs have been advised that sufficient credit threshold for full Level 3 in their sector, sub-sector(s) and occupations should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Represents appropriate number of credits, and volume of skills and knowledge to demonstrate occupational competence in the sector. ▪ Enables an employee to move to next level of employment in the sector. ▪ Enables an employee to progress to higher level skills and learning ▪ Gives a 'licence to practice' in a profession. <p>Qualifications below 25 credits and over 70 credits should only be approved in exceptional circumstances.</p> <p>If the threshold is set such that there are full Level 3 qualifications as both Certificate and Diploma at Level 3, SSCs/SBs/SSBs should have fully considered the implications and need to provide:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Rationale for regarding both a Certificate <i>and</i> a Diploma at the same level as full qualifications in one sub-sector or occupational area. ▪ Employment opportunities that justify fullness at each stage. ▪ Issues regarding learner entitlement considering LSC policy of firstness. <p>If there are any implications for progression routes between these qualifications.</p>
Primary purpose	Full Level 3 qualifications will have the specified main purpose and sub-purpose as defined on the list supplied by the regulators and entered on the

	<p>web-based accreditation system (WBA).</p> <p>The main purpose identifiers suitable for full Level 3 encompass:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> B. Prepare for further learning or training and/or develop knowledge and/or skills in a subject area; D. Confirm occupational competence and/or 'licence to practice'; and E. Updating and continuing professional development (CPD); <p>as defined in the OfQual's <i>Identifying purposes for qualifications in the Qualifications and Credit Framework</i>; February 2009.</p> <p>In the QCF, SSCs/SSBs/SBs will be responsible for approving vocational qualifications threshold and content for full Level 3 qualifications, with a main identifying purpose D: Confirm occupational competence and/or 'licence to practice'.</p> <p>It is acknowledged that there might be secondary sub-purpose fields – for example, within the purpose definition E to reflect the breath of qualification.</p> <p>Note that not all qualifications with the purpose definition B, D or E will be automatically full Level 3. They need to be approved and aligned to SQS and NOS as previously described.</p>
Portability	<p>Full Level 3 credit threshold should ensure that qualifications are portable for the individual, including the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ That level of literacy, numeracy, ICT and other generic and transferable skills are in line with the NOS minimum entry requirement for that profession. ▪ Qualification is transferable across employers in the sector.
Progression and employ-ability	<p>When designing full Level 3 qualifications it is important to consider progression routes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Is there a sufficient threshold to progress to Higher Education or higher level skills? ▪ Specify what kind of professional or employment related progression will be enabled.

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