

# Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF)

## Interim Definition of Full Level 3 Qualifications

## Guidance for Sector Skills Councils

June 2009

This document is of interest to Sector Skills  
Councils

### **Further information**

For further information please contact the appropriate Learning and Skills Council office. Contact details for each office can be found on the LSC website: [www.lsc.gov.uk](http://www.lsc.gov.uk)

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# Qualifications and Credit Framework

## Guidance

### **Determining full Level 3 threshold in the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) for Sector Skills Councils/Sector Bodies/Standard Setting Bodies**

1. 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 period to 31 August 2010. LSC will monitor, manage and evaluate this definition during this period. Sector Skills Councils (SSCs), Standard Setting Bodies (SSBs) and Sector Bodies (SBs) will be able to vary the thresholds as appropriate, providing 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.

2. This guidance has been developed to assist SSCs/SBs/SSBs to take account of relevant information and consider appropriate evidence when articulating full Level 3 thresholds by sectors or sub-sector. The guidance will also help SSCs/SBs/SSBs and LSC deal with the approval of existing qualifications in the QCF in the first instance, and to take forward the ongoing development and approval of new qualifications. It is intended that the guidance should support transparency, consistency and a minimum level of comparability across sectors as full Level 3 thresholds are defined.

3. LSC expects that SSCs/SSBs/SBs will work closely with Awarding Organisations (AOs) in the identification and confirmation of full Level 3 through the respective AO forums. It is important that full Level 3 thresholds are communicated early to AOs in order to inform future and ongoing qualification development.

4. As already indicated, LSC will be using the Sector Qualification Strategy Action Plans (SQS APs) to inform funding eligibility decisions, and SSCs/SBs/SSBs will advise LSC on which key vocational qualifications should be funded<sup>1</sup>. In the context of full Level 3 LSC will be reviewing the current funding priorities to take account of the new interim definition to ensure public funding is supporting the right provision. Further work will also be undertaken to establish and manage affordability.

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<sup>1</sup> Please note that funding rates for qualifications are determined by the input and therefore not all full Level 3 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.

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5. LSC will convene a small working group of SSCs/SSBs/SBs to take forward ongoing work and issues surrounding the identification and confirmation of full Level 3, in conjunction with the work done for full Level 2 qualifications. At the same time LSC will ensure early dissemination of information to AOs and work, through the LSC AO Advisory Group, to ensure that AOs are fully aware of and can feed back on ongoing developments.

6. The table below details the proposed guidance for determining the threshold:

<b>Category</b>	<b>Information to be provided by SSC</b>
<b>Content and sector fit</b>	<p><b>SSCs/SBs/SSBs to confirm</b> that they have taken into account the following when setting the full Level 3 credit threshold:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The full Level 3 credit threshold for their sector, sub-sector(s) and occupations is aligned to National Occupational Standards (NOS), which is up to date and approved/endorsed by employers. It is expected NOS will be a reference point for all provision.</li> <li>▪ The full Level 3 threshold is set in accordance with the relevant SQS and Action Plan, and therefore provides 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 sector, sub-sector(s) or occupations.</li> <li>▪ The full Level 3 credit threshold is comparable with thresholds set by other SSCs/SBs/SSBs with similar footprints, and is aligned where there are allied occupations.</li> </ul> <p>Additional evidence will be required for the purposes of monitoring:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Information regarding predecessor qualifications.</li> <li>▪ Details of who has been consulted when establishing the requirements for full Level 3 threshold (Awarding Organisations, key employers, professional bodies etc).</li> <li>▪ Other quality indicators – e.g. professional endorsements, quality standards obtained etc.</li> </ul>
<b>Sufficiency of threshold</b>	<p><b>SSCs/SBs/SSBs to confirm</b> credit threshold for full Level 3 in their sector, sub-sector(s) and occupations.</p> <p>This should be considered in line with the options given below:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Represents appropriate number of credits, and volume of skills and knowledge to demonstrate occupational competence in the sector.</li> <li>▪ Enables an employee to move to next level of employment in the sector</li> <li>▪ Enables an employee to progress to higher level skills and learning.</li> <li>▪ Gives a 'licence to practice' in a profession.</li> </ul> <p><b>Qualifications below 25 credits and over 70 credits should only be approved in exceptional circumstances.</b></p> <p>If the threshold is set such that there are full Level 3 qualifications at both Certificate and Diploma at Level 3, <b>SSCs/SBs/SSBs should have fully considered the implications and need to provide:</b></p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 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.</li> <li>▪ Employment opportunities that justify fullness at each stage.</li> <li>▪ Issues regarding learner entitlement considering LSC policy of firstness.</li> <li>▪ If there are any implications for progression routes between these qualifications.</li> </ul>
<b>Primary purpose</b>	<p><b>SSCs/SBs/SSBs to confirm what is the specified main purpose and sub-purpose for their qualifications</b> as defined on the list supplied by the regulators and entered on the web-based accreditation system (WBA).</p> <p>The main purpose identifiers suitable for full Level 3 encompass:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>B. Prepare for further learning or training and/or develop knowledge and/or skills in a subject area;</li> <li>D. Confirm occupational competence and/or ‘licence to practice’; and</li> <li>E. Updating and continuing professional development (CPD);</li> </ul> <p>as defined in the OfQual’s <i>Identifying purposes for qualifications in the Qualifications and Credit Framework</i>; February 2009).</p> <p><b>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’.</b></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><b>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.</b></p>
<b>Portability</b>	<p><b>SSCs/SBs/SSBs to confirm</b> that it has been considered if the credit threshold is going to ensure that qualifications are portable for the individual, including the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ That level of literacy, numeracy, ICT and other generic skills are in line with the NOS minimum entry requirement for that profession (specify number of credits for literacy, numeracy and ICT required at this level).</li> <li>▪ Qualification is transferable across employers in the sector.</li> <li>▪ Are there other transferable credits?</li> </ul>
<b>Progression and employability</b>	<p><b>SSCs/SBs/SSBs to confirm</b> progression routes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Is there a sufficient threshold to progress to Higher Education or higher level skills?</li> <li>▪ Specify what kind of professional or employment related progression will be enabled.</li> </ul>

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## **Annex A: Funding Scenarios for Full Level 3 Qualifications**

### **LSC Funding Model**

The LSC statement of priorities for 2009/10 clearly sets out the LSC investment strategy in further education skills and training and highlights the flexibilities within the funding system to fund priorities that do not immediately lead to full qualifications. Examples of particular policy areas where this is the case is the Integrated Employment and Skills Agenda and the SME flexibilities within the Train to Gain programme.

The importance of SSCs/SBs/SSBs' decisions about what constitutes a full qualification will be critical to ensuring that when a learner exercises their entitlement to a funded first full Level 3 qualification, it gives them the platform for employability to enter and sustain employment.

Funding is prioritised to a learner's **first** full Level 3 qualification<sup>2</sup>. Any subsequent qualifications at the same level would not be automatically entitled to full public funding. The implication is that if the threshold for a full Level 3 qualification is set lower than what is deemed necessary by the sector for subsequent employment or progression opportunities, the situation could arise where an individual takes and achieves the full qualification, uses their entitlement to public funding (i.e. the course is fully funded) but then subsequently has to participate in further learning at their own expense to meet the sectors' requirements for employment or progression into further or higher learning.

The two examples detailed below illustrate what may happen given different scenarios arising from the SSCs/SBs/SSBs' decision of where the threshold for a full Level 3 qualification is set. Scenario A illustrates the correct model leading to desired outcomes and aligned with LSC funding priorities, while Scenario B illustrates a model that leads to perverse consequences for learners, employers and providers and should therefore be avoided.

#### **Scenario A**

If a Certificate or Diploma size qualification has been set as a 'full' Level 3 by a SSC/SSB/SB and this is recognised to be the requirement for progression into employment, or for progression to HE then this fits with the LSC funding priorities.

This model will enable learners to understand how to use their entitlement to a publicly funded first full Level 3 qualification to progress either into employment within the sector or onto higher education. In this scenario a learner can achieve clear progression and/or employability objectives, and employers have confidence that a full Level 3 qualification confers skills necessary for a particular type of job. It is also expected that a full Level 3 will

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<sup>2</sup> With the exception being those repeat qualifications identified as repeat funding within TTG additional flexibilities.

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be accepted by employers across the relevant sector, and it would provide sufficient level of transferable skills. Thus a full Level 3 gives learners sustainable options for employment and progression, and employers an understanding and confidence that full Level 3 qualification equates with their employment requirements.

## **Scenario B**

If a Certificate size qualification has been set as a full Level 3, but employers in the sector commonly require a Diploma to progress to employment or for progression to HE then the qualification being identified as a funding priority by the SSC does not actually meet employer's needs.

This would mean that an individual might use their entitlement for their first full Level 3, but on successful completion, would still fall short of employment and progression requirements and hence would need to engage in further learning at Level 3.

This scenario would arise whenever the full Level 3 criteria are set lower than the sector requirement for employment, or the requirements for progression to Level 3. For instance, if a Certificate was assigned a full Level 3 status yet a Diploma was what was required by the sector, the Certificate would not be prioritised for funding as it does not meet employability and/or progression criteria. If this scenario was to occur, it would mean that employers would have a negative perception of full Level 3, because it would not give learners skills necessary for employment.

The impact on learners would be that they had achieved their first full Level 3 and therefore used up their entitlement and not be able to move forward to employment, or progress into higher education.

This could have further significance, as this option might lead to further perverse consequences in relation to delivery and provider behaviour, where it might become economically attractive to offer learners the shortest and cheapest qualifications. The impact on learner retention rates and qualification success rate may also be significant in provider decision.

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