

# **Flexible Delivery – Unit Funding Trials (UFT) Adult Skills Budget 10/11**

**Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF)**

**Guidance and Information**

The intended audience for this document is providers involved with the unit funding trails for 10/11.

**13 December 2010**

## Purpose

1. This document offers guidance and support to providers involved in the Flexible Delivery - Unit Funding Trials. These are being taken forward as part of the Skills Funding Agency's (Agency) ongoing implementation of the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) and delivered through the single Adult Skills Budget funding during 2010/11.
2. As part of the support for Flexible Delivery - Unit Funding Trials (UFT) we will produce specific updates for providers as and when necessary. Although the trials run for the whole of the current delivery year, we will be seeking to produce a formal report on the progress and emerging outcomes arising from the trials towards the end of March 2011.
3. During January 2011 we will be looking to expand the trials, specifically seeking to involve additional providers who are interested in focusing delivery on adults who are unemployed and/or seeking to return to employment. In January we will produce a further update giving more information on the progress of the trials so far, and the parameters within which we will expand the trials. .

## Background and introduction

4. We are now approaching the end of the formal programme of Vocational Qualification Reform and the first phase of QCF implementation. This first phase has been predominantly concerned with populating the QCF and making the QCF an operational reality. Since summer 2010 we have been taking forward a process of focusing funding on provision in the QCF and away from provision in the National Qualifications Framework. By the end of 2010 the majority of publicly funded providers across the Adult Skills system will be delivering an increasingly QCF focussed offer.
5. By the end of 2010 population of the QCF will be almost complete. Already there are over 6,000 qualifications available in the QCF and over 20,000 units. By early 2011 it is anticipated that all vocational qualifications will be in the QCF and, although the QCF will continue to grow and expand, it is not expected that we will see the volume of provision going into the QCF that we have witnessed since 2008 when the QCF came out of a test and trial phase.
6. Having made the QCF an 'operational reality' the focus on implementation going forward now needs to be on realising the flexibilities that the QCF as a unit and credit based qualification framework can deliver to learners and employers, and understanding the role of the QCF within a reformed Adult Skills system and its relationship with areas such as Next Step and Learning Accounts. The Coalition Government's aspiration for the reform of the skills system is set out in the recent Skills Strategy ([Skills for Sustainable Growth](#), November 2010). This, along with the recent Skills

Investment Strategy (Further Education – New Horizon Investing in Skills for Sustainable Growth) contains a clear commitment to the ongoing implementation of the QCF. Going forward we now need to continue to work with key delivery partners (Sector Skills Councils, awarding organisations and providers) to better understand how the QCF can support innovation in delivery, flexibility in learning, and the facility to accumulate nationally recognised achievement in smaller steps. Critically we want to work with the sector to understand local learner demand for credit accumulation and transfer and to build a credit market which can be a part of supporting greater freedoms and flexibilities across the sector, with learners able to accumulate and transfer credit towards target qualifications.

7. Central to delivering the flexibilities offered by the QCF is the Personal Learning Record (PLR). This is an online and free to access record where learners can have all their achievement stored in one place, and which can be used to help the learner identify future episodes of learning and also identify those qualifications they may have already accumulated credit towards. The PLR is also a critical component in the development of Lifelong Learning Accounts and the all age careers service.
8. We would like to see the unit funding trials build the case and demonstrate the emerging benefits of a system where learners can undertake learning more flexibly, can accumulate credit and can transfer that credit towards target qualifications. From the Agency's side we want to understand what the funding and performance inhibitors may be in delivering greater flexibility and to feed this into the work that is now underway to put in place a simpler funding methodology. From a provider side, we want to support the building of evidence for the demand for a 'credit market', including action research and case studies that can show the benefits to the individual of a more flexible system.
9. Unlike the first phase of unit funding trials, we believe that now the QCF is an operational reality and almost fully populated, we are better equipped to take implementation to the next stage and begin to explore and deliver the real benefits of a unit and credit system, including how this can both empower learner choice and also enhance qualification achievement.

## **Objectives of the Trials**

10. Findings from the first round of trials which concluded on the 31<sup>st</sup> July 2010 identified there is work still to be done to support providers in using and exploiting the flexibilities of QCF in a "live" operational environment and to assess the costs and affordability of flexible delivery from a provider and learner perspective. This includes a need to work with awarding organisations to understand and support how they can better frame a more 'flexible offer' to providers.

11. For more information on the first phase of the trials refer to the Evaluation of QCF Unit Funding Trials in England – [Summary Report](#).
12. In taking forward the second phase of unit funding trials, we identified a range of high level objectives which framed the Expressions of Interest for providers to become involved in the trials. The objectives are:
  - To look at how flexible delivery of qualifications can be supported
  - To look at how learners can begin to accumulate and transfer credit
  - To look at how flexible or ‘unitised delivery’ can enhance learner access to and achievement of target qualifications
  - To look at how flexible or ‘unitised delivery’ can support co-investment.
13. Following confirmation of participation in the trials, the selected providers were requested to confirm units they wish to deliver as part of the UFTs. The Agency reviewed the units to ensure that the selected units form part of the Rules of Combination for qualifications confirmed for funding. The confirmed units are currently being assigned funding rates and will become available through the Learning Aim Database prior to Christmas for providers to use.

## Individualised Learner Record (ILR)

14. Providers are expected to complete all the ILR fields in compliance with guidance published by the Information Authority for mainstream funded provision through their Adult Budget return.
15. In addition providers are required to enter **code ‘122’ in field A46** – Special projects and pilots

## Identifying Available Learning Aims

16. Providers involved in the trial are able to deliver QCF qualification confirmed for funding by the Skills Funding Agency. In addition providers will be able to record QCF units confirmed for funding by the Skills Funding Agency specifically for use in the trials. The list of confirmed units can be found on the Skills Funding Agency website alongside the list of providers eligible to take part in the [trials](#).
17. To support the recording of the confirmed units for the trials on the ILR, the units have been added to the Learning Aim Database (LAD).

18. **Please note that only providers participating in the Unit Funding Trials are eligible to record the units as fundable in the ILR and all these units must be approved by the Agency in advance.**
19. To ensure that the identified units are recorded as fundable only by eligible providers the Agency will be tracking the use of the unit codes using the learning aim reference, the provider UPIN and the designated code in the Special Projects and Pilots field (A46).
20. If you have any queries about the information showing on the LAD, contact the [QCF team](#).

## **Personal Learning Record**

21. The Personal Learning Record supports the accumulation and transfer of achievement for all vocational qualifications within the QCF. As part of the Unit Funding Trials, colleges have made the commitment to use the Agency's QCF Personal Learner Record (PLR).
22. Through the Personal Learner Record you will be able to support the learner to access and interpret their QCF achievement data and will play an important role in assigning and verifying learners' Unique Learner Numbers (ULNs).
23. 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. Colleges can confirm with the Agency, awarding organisations that are currently willing to use the PLR.
24. In early 2011 the Agency will be issuing further guidance on the Personal Learning Record.
25. For more information and general guidance on the Personal Learning Record visit the [Learning Records Service](#) website.

## **Research & Evaluation**

26. As part of the trials we have commissioned an evaluation and have recently contracted [Ekogen](#) in partnership with [education relations](#) to undertake this work. .
27. The evaluation has been commissioned to help understand and develop this area of work by assessing the delivery, implementation and impact of

the funding trials. There is a particular interest in capturing case studies of emerging approaches to flexible delivery, understanding learner demand for flexible delivery and credit accumulation and transfer and how far there may be emerging evidence of the benefits of flexible delivery to learners and employers.

28. The evaluation has a tight timescale and will produce a formal report at the end of March 2011. To inform the report the contractors will be seeking to work closely with providers involved in the trials and focusing on the following areas;

- Affordability;
- Learner Motivation;
- Unit Credit Accumulation and Transfer (CAT)
- Co-Financing

29. Ekosgen is a leading UK research and evaluation company with a specialist Learning, Skills and Social Policy practice. They are working in partnership with Education Relations who have experience of delivering support programmes, including Foundation Learning, across the sector. .

30. For any queries or information regarding evaluation or research, please contact [Tim Allan](#) (ekosgen) on 07912 780202 or [Richard Sharples](#) (Education Relations) on 07711118407.

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Skills Funding Agency – P--100056