

Unit Funding Trials Summary

**Testing the flexibility offered to
learners by the Qualifications and
Credit Framework**

10 November 2010

Background Information

- 1 The Skills Funding Agency (and previously the Learning and Skills Council) are taking forward Unit Funding Trials to test out the flexibility in terms of modular delivery and credit accumulation and transfer of the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) offer. The first phase of Unit Funding Trials ran over 2008/09 and 2009/10. The second phase of the trials will cover the 2010/11 period.
- 2 The first phase trials operated on the basis of a list of specific QCF units identified by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) in partnership with Sector Skills Councils (SSCs) and Awarding Organisations (AOs). Participation in the trials was open to all providers in both Adult Learner Responsive and Train to Gain (the Train to Gain unit funding trials were taken forward as part of the SME Flexibilities work in 2009).
- 3 The first phase of the trials concluded on 31 July 2010 for new starts and the units in the trials are no longer eligible for funding outside of the rules of combination of QCF qualifications already confirmed for funding. The LSC/Agency commissioned an evaluation of the first phase trials which was undertaken by [HOST Policy Research](#). Participation in the trials was limited and there were a number of identified issues in the structure of the trials that restricted their ability to achieve the strategic objective of testing the flexibility of the QCF, specifically in terms of how unitised delivery could facilitate engagement towards qualification achievement, and how far unitised delivery could respond to particular needs of Small to Medium Enterprises.

Update

- 4 The three key issues identified with regard to the first phase trials were:
 - A number of providers offering the available units, were 'not aware' that by doing so they were actively involved in the trials
 - Of the 644 units available over the two year period of the trial, only 299 had 1 or more enrolments on them, suggesting that the approach to selecting units was not effective
 - Due to the lack of clear strategic direction overall of the trials they did not achieve the core aim of testing the flexibilities of the QCF.
- 5 To address the key concerns identified above, the approach for supporting the unit funding trials in 2010/11 has been substantially revised. The Skills Funding Agency (the Agency) is seeking to work more closely with providers involved in the trials and the Agency's Account Managers have also been involved in supporting providers who have submitted an Expression of Interest to be involved in the trials.
- 6 For the second phase trials we have invited providers to submit proposals focusing on the rationale for wishing to undertake unitised delivery. As before there is no new funding for the second phase of trials and the trials will need to be delivered within existing adult learner responsive offer.
- 7 On 23 July 2010 the Agency issued an invitation for interested providers to submit an Expression of Interest for Adult Learner Responsive Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) Flexible Delivery (Unit Funding Trials). The key parameters within which the Agency was seeking providers to participate in the second round of the unit funding trials were:

- Units selected should be in the Rules of Combination of qualifications already confirmed for funding
- A particular focus on learners working at Entry and Level 1 in terms of how flexible delivery can engage hard to reach learners
- Particular focus on groups of learners returning to work or preparing to return to work
- Particular focus on learners where unitised delivery could stimulate engagement and enhance qualification achievement
- Particular focus on flexible delivery across Level 3 and 4 where unitised delivery, credit accumulation and transfer could enhance progression opportunities
- Focus on delivery which could support co investment
- Proposals where providers are working strategically with Awarding Organisations
- Particular focus on proposals which stimulate credit accumulation and transfer.

- 8 The invitation to submit an Expression of Interest closed on the 13 August 2010. The Agency received 31 Expressions of Interest.
- 9 The Expressions of Interest have been reviewed and 19 providers have been identified to participate in the second phase of trials. The Agency will now be working with the providers to confirm the approaches to test the flexibility of the QCF and identify the appropriate units to support learners involved in the trials. All providers involved in these trials have made the commitment to use the Agency's QCF Personal Learner Record. A list of providers who have been accepted are referenced in annex A.
- 10 A list of units that are available for the Unit Funding Trials will be published in due course.
- 11 Providers who would like to participate in the 2010/11 trials must be confident they can perform successfully to the profile they have agreed with the Agency. To assist providers with making this decision it is also worth being aware of the contents of the Agency's [Guidance Note 4](#).
- 12 **Please note** that in 2010/11 the Agency will be offering support to other programmes that will involve the delivery of QCF units; specifically [Qualify with a Business](#) and the [Joint Investment Programme](#). Further details about the requirements and purpose of these programmes can be found from the links above. Please note that involvement in one programme, does not guarantee involvement in the others.

Annex A

Name of College	Type of Organisation	Summary of Eol
Blackburn College	College	Entry Level and Level 1 provision. Working with young mothers and new parents. Combined Young mums to be and parents with prospects into one qualification which they want to test as part of this project. Returners to work. Using unitised delivery to offer units which will improve employability. Flexible delivery approach to Level 3 & Level 4. Working to stimulate co-investment working with AOs to develop new quals.
Cirencester College Business School	College	To work with employers to explore their willingness for co-invest in small qualifications. Working with learners who previously have been reluctant to engage. Commitment to satisfy employer demand.
City of Bristol College College Green Centre,	College	Comprehensive range of units at entry level. Working with Bristol City Council and local HE/FE partners. Explore how accumulation of credit informs student recruitment. Impact of QCF on curriculum design. Personal & Social Development; Childcare and Social Care
Eastleigh College	College	Commitment to employer contribution. Engage at Level 2 to encourage progression. Using units as initial steps into full qualifications, as well as Apprenticeships. Exploring offering units as a bonus "add-on" to qualifications to satisfy employment requirements.
Gloucester	College	Working with learners at entry level and level 1 and returning to work. Target training to increase employability, in partnership with JCP to meet the needs for IT training within their outreach centres. Using units to work with the unemployed to move them from pathways into mainstream provision.
Hillcroft College	College	Explore further the benefits of a unitised approach. Target women who have not previously engaged in learning and support progression. Working in partnership with Regent College and OUVS to deliver Level 4 and progression into FE/HE
Learning Plus (also known as V Learning Net)	Private Provider	Third sector consortia. Hard to reach learners. Keen on unitised delivery. Encourage hard to reach learners into progression, supporting disadvantaged learners. Working on methods of retaining these learners.
Leeds City College	College	Focus on inclusiveness through enhancing flexibilities. Entry level 1/2 19+ NEET; Business Admin; Childcare and Trade union studies. To use units to extend range of financially accessible courses. To evaluate and compare the different programmes to identify a model providing maximum financial efficiency and student success and progression.
Leek College of Further Education and School of Art	College	Experience of unitised delivery. Partners with Staffordshire Uni. Good range of units. Developing a unitised curriculum to enhance the skills of people intending to progress to Foundation Degree, HE and Open University. Improve retention.
Leicester College	College	Working with hard to reach low skilled individuals who face barriers to learning. Using trials to maximise flexibility and success for this target group introduce concept of portability, accumulation and transfer of units. Computer and Beauty therapy develop the specific identified need for flexible modular provision.
Northern College, Barnsley	College	SDI. Residential college. Commitment to offering formal qualifications to men and women who have no formal qualifications and are seeking to return to learning or work. Explore linking short course provision to progress to full qualifications.
Preston College	College	Retail units. Working within the retail sector to gain employer contributions. Unitised delivery will support learners - working with return to work and redundant learners. Working with voluntary and employed sector on learner progression. Explore CAT in the retail sector.

Ruskin College	College	EDI. Working with the unemployed and homeless and those with mental health problems. Using the trials to breakdown qualifications into manageable units to satisfy learning goals, but will also support their progression into employment. Flexible delivery will assist learners with the accumulation of units.
Stockton Riverside College	College	To improve the employability of adults seeking work through unitised based responsive skills development and accreditation, and encourage full qualification completion once employment is secured. Working with local employers and AOs/JC+ and Next Step.
Swathmore Education Centre	HEI	Hard to reach learners/working with LA; open college network. Holders of a next step contract. Promote with learners the opportunities that accumulation and transfer of credit towards a qualifications gives them. Promote use of QCF with learners and employers. Working with the AO to develop qualifications at entry level and level 1 provide accreditation for learning in small steps.
Swindon College	College	Use units to up skill unemployed learners who cannot gain funding through other means. Raise skills through learners being able to apply for jobs, increase their skills in sectors where jobs are available eg retail; hospitality; administration and security and enable them to continue their learning in the workplace.
Walsall Adult and Community College	LEA	LEA. Good Partnership working/community links. Unemployed learners/employers/low skilled. Using the trials to develop a strategy that will motivate and engage hard to reach learners achieve and progress to full qualifications and higher levels. Using units to develop specific skills identified as part of their IAG.
Walsall College	College	Develop QCF implementation further. AO. Working with employers; PLR; progress to L4. Using the benefits of QCF college has enhanced its partnership working with employers by becoming a recognised awarding organisation. Commitment to using the PLR. Keen to test and trial modular and flexible delivery alongside flexible learning models. The trial would provide an opportunity to broaden the range of modules on offer encouraging a wider engagement.
Workers' Education Association	SDI	SDI: Direct Employer links: across England; EoI committed to meeting original UFT criteria. Covering the whole of England. Offering QCF via short courses, where learners have repeat engagement opportunities for CAT. Focus on return to work learners offering ICT and units from progression awards. Working with newly engaged learners taking their first steps on the qualification journey, with the aim of encouraging take-up in the future.

Skills Funding Agency

Cheylesmore House
Quinton Road
Coventry CV1 2WT
T 0845 019 4170
F 024 7682 3675

www.bis.gov.uk/skillsfundingagency

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