QCA Qualifications and
Curriculum Authority

Guidance on the development of full level 2 specifications/frameworks within the fast-track arrangements for the Qualifications and Credit Framework

August 2007

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Contents

Introduction

This guidance supplements *Design principles for full level 2 within the QCF fast-track*, August 2007. It provides further detail of the requirements outlined within the design principles and provides an overview of the model for describing and achieving full level 2.

This guidance applies to full level 2 provision developed as part of the fast-track arrangements for the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF), operating between August 2007 and July 2008. The references that follow are to the document *Design principles for full level 2 within the QCF fast-track*. DP stands for design principle.

1. Full level 2 specification/framework and component qualification design

1.1 Model for describing/achieving full level 2 (ref: all DPs)

The design principles require that full level 2 for adults should include achievement of a combination of vocationally specific knowledge, skills and understanding, and wider skills and attributes of value in employment generally. This combination of skills should provide a basis for further development and progression to higher skills levels. The precise balance between specific and more general skills and the depth and breadth at which these skills are achieved may vary from sector to sector, and according to the purpose of qualifications. However, to ensure transferability and validity of achievement, the design principles require that there is a minimum volume of overall achievement.

The design principles are available separately for reference. Key aspects to note are:

- All the design principles must be met for provision to be recognised as full level 2.

- While it is possible that a single qualification will meet all the design principles, this is not a requirement. Full level 2 can therefore be achieved through appropriate combinations of 'component' qualifications, which together meet all the design

principles. This combination of qualifications is referred to as a 'full level 2 specification/framework'[1].

- Learners are required to achieve a component qualification, which covers the relevant skills from Strands A and B, plus component qualifications (preferably the new functional skills qualifications[2]) at an appropriate level in literacy, numeracy and ICT (skills from Strand C).

- It is possible that a single qualification will include all these components (that is, Strands A, B and C). However, it is more likely that learners will complete the component qualifications separately. An Annex provides a diagrammatic representation of this model.

- In line with the recommendations of *World Class Skills: Implementing the Leitch Review of Skills in England* (July 2007), the appropriate combinations of accredited component qualifications that make up a full level 2 specification/framework will be approved by the relevant sector skills council (SSC)[3].

1.2 Overall achievement within full level 2 (ref: DP 5)

The design principles require that full level 2 specifications/frameworks develop the following strands of knowledge, skills and understanding:

- Strand A: personal/social skills

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[1] Note that this is a working title – to be reviewed in July 2008.

[2] Where it is not possible for a learner to undertake functional skills qualifications, then these skills will need to be achieved through other relevant accredited qualifications, for example key skills or skills for life – see section 1.7.

[3] Where the term 'SSC' is used within this document, it reflects the terminology used within *World Class Skills: Implementing the Leitch Review of Skills in England* (July 2007). Where full level 2 qualifications or specifications/frameworks fall within sector footprints currently covered by sector bodies other than SSCs (eg standards setting bodies (SSBs)), then it is the responsibility of that sector body to liaise with the relevant 'lead' SSC to agree roles and responsibilities.

- Strand B: vocational knowledge, skills and understanding

- Strand C: literacy, numeracy and ICT.

All strands should be developed and achieved within a full level 2 specification/framework, through the component qualifications. However, no minimum or maximum percentages or credit ranges are specified for each individual strand.

1.3 Strand A: Personal/social skills (ref: DP 5 & 6)

It is expected that the knowledge, skills and understanding relating to Strand A will be included within a component qualification that also includes knowledge, skills and understanding relating to Strand B. Organisations developing these component qualifications should decide:

i. which knowledge, skills and understanding areas relating to Strand A should be developed and achieved

ii. how these knowledge, skills and understanding areas should be represented within the component qualification (for example as stand-alone units or embedded within units covering Strand B).

i. Areas of knowledge, skills and understanding relating to Strand A

A definition of Strand A is provided within the design principles; however, this definition is not intended to be exhaustive. Organisations will be expected to clarify their interpretation of the scope and nature of knowledge, skills and understanding relating to this strand, based on an understanding of which areas of knowledge, skills and understanding, at what level and in which combinations, promote a platform for sustainable employability within a sector area(s). It is expected that awarding bodies and SSCs will wish to liaise and agree at an overarching level what knowledge, skills and understanding areas, at what levels, are relevant to a particular sector.

To support other ongoing initiatives, content relating to Strand A should, wherever possible, include coverage of the six groups of skills included within the personal, learning and thinking skills framework. Coverage of the personal, learning and thinking skills framework is a requirement within the 14–19 Diploma, but the framework was designed to also be applicable for adults. The design of full level 2 component qualifications therefore provides a good opportunity to investigate development and achievement of the personal, learning and thinking skills within the context of a

'vocational' qualification, to ensure future transferability and currency of skills across provision for young people and adults.

Details of the six personal, learning and thinking skills areas can be found within the document *A framework of personal, learning and thinking skills 11–19 in England*. Note that the CBI has also recently published a report entitled *Embedding employability on work experience* (March 2007), which provides some useful guidance on the expectations for employers and learners concerning employability skills and, in particular, personal/social skills. For further details visit: www.cbi.org.uk.

ii. Representing Strand A within a component qualification

Organisations developing full level 2 component qualifications are expected to determine the most appropriate methods for representing development and achievement of relevant personal/social skills (including the six personal, learning and thinking skills areas) within the qualification. For example this may be done through developing stand-alone units of assessment, through embedding development of relevant Strand A knowledge, skills and understanding within other units of assessment, or through a combination of these approaches. The methods for developing and achieving personal/social skills should include consideration of how these skills will be addressed within learning outcomes and associated content, and within assessment criteria.

Awarding bodies will be asked during the accreditation process how the personal/social skills are developed through the component qualification, and how achievement of these is represented.

1.4 Strand B: Vocational knowledge, skills and understanding (ref: DP 3, 5 & 6)

A definition of Strand B is provided within the design principles. However, this definition is not intended to be exhaustive. Organisations developing full level 2 component qualifications will be expected to clarify their interpretation of the scope and nature of knowledge, skills and understanding relating to this strand. This will be based on an understanding of which areas of knowledge, skills and understanding, at what level and in which particular combinations, promote a platform for sustainable employability within a sector area. This knowledge, skills and understanding should then be developed and achieved through a relevant component qualification that also includes knowledge, skills and understanding relating to Strand A – see Annex. Qualification development must take account of sector skills agreements, sector qualification strategies (SQS) and SQS action plans, and other robust labour market intelligence.

1.5 Size of full level 2 component qualification covering Strands A and B (ref: DP 6)

For the purposes of the QCF fast-track, the minimum number of total credits to be achieved from the component qualification covering Strands A and B will be 37. The report accompanying the *Working version design principles* (April 07) outlined why the decision was taken to omit consideration of achievement from Strand C within this figure. This effectively means that a component qualification covering Strands A and B must require achievement of 37 credits or more.

The QCF fast-track provides an opportunity for organisations developing full level 2 component qualifications to investigate and feedback on the appropriateness of the overarching minimum size. We would expect any such feedback to be made based on a clear understanding and articulation of the needs of learners and employers within the relevant sector area and, in particular, of how those needs reflect the knowledge, skills and understanding necessary to support sustainable employability.

Where information is provided that supports the appropriateness of full level 2 component qualifications covering Strands A and B below 37 credits in size, then the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) and the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) are committed to discussing this issue with SSCs and awarding bodies. The overarching minimum size requirement and credit range (along with all the other design principles) will be also reviewed during the course of the tests and trials.

Note that the design principles also allow SSCs to specify a minimum size that is larger than the overarching minimum. Where SSCs wish to use this flexibility, they should discuss their intentions with the QCA. It is expected that any such decisions by SSCs will be made based on a clear understanding and articulation of the needs of learners and employers within the relevant sector area, and in particular how those needs reflect the knowledge, skills and understanding necessary to support sustainable employability. Any decisions to raise the overarching minimum in particular sectors, once agreed with the QCA, will need to be clearly communicated by the SSC to all awarding bodies developing full level 2 component qualifications as part of the QCF fast-track in the relevant sector area.

No maximum size has been set for full level 2 component qualifications, although the size should be appropriate to purpose and not include unrealistic expectations in terms of achievement.

Note that the design principles also allow SSCs to specify a minimum number of credits covering Strands A and B at level 2 or above that is larger than the overarching minimum required by the QCF, ie greater than 60 per cent of the total credits for the qualification. Where SSCs wish to use this flexibility, they should discuss their intentions with the QCA. It is expected that any such decisions by sectors will be made based on a clear understanding and articulation of the needs of learners and employers within the relevant sector area, and in particular how those needs reflect the knowledge, skills and understanding necessary to support sustainable employability. These decisions should also take into account that requiring very high percentages of achievement at level 2 or above may disadvantage learners progressing onto full level 2 from the foundation learning tier or from less traditional routes.

Any decisions to raise the overarching minimum of achievement at level 2 in particular sectors, once agreed with the QCA, will need to be clearly communicated by the SSC to all awarding bodies developing full level 2 specifications/frameworks as part of the QCF tests and trials in the relevant sector area.

1.6 Combination of units within full level 2 component qualifications (ref: DP 1)

Given the nature of learners and learning towards and at full level 2, it is expected that organisations developing full level 2 component qualifications will wish to explore methods for developing rules of combination that allow inclusion of units that promote progression and inclusivity, and can include achievement:

- at appropriate levels below and above level 2[4]

- in an appropriate range of settings and contexts.

Note that the technical specification of the QCF affords the flexibility for rules of combination for qualifications to allow a wide range of achievement, recognised through credit.

1.7 Strand C: Literacy, numeracy and ICT (ref: DP 5 & 7)

The design principles require that qualifications prescribed by the relevant standards in literacy, numeracy and ICT should be achieved within full level 2. To meet the requirements of full level 2, in addition to their qualification covering Strands A and B, learners must therefore also achieve a qualification covering each of literacy, numeracy and ICT, at the appropriate level. The full level 2 specification/framework should therefore include either the functional skills qualifications or the equivalent key skills, basic skills or skills for life qualifications at the relevant level.

Functional skills qualifications will be available through a three-year pilot programme from September 2007. Entry to this pilot is limited – please contact the QCA for further details. More information on all the key and basic skills qualifications currently accredited onto the NQF can be obtained at www.qca.org.uk, or for further guidance please email the QCA at frameworktestsandtrials@qca.org.uk.

Section 1.1 stated that the model for full level 2 allows for the possibility of Strands A, B and C all being covered within a single qualification (similarly to the 14–19 Diploma model). Awarding bodies can therefore explore designing qualifications in such a way that the Strand C component is included within the rules of combination of a qualification that also covers Strands A and B. However, it should be noted that under current plans, of the relevant permissible Strand C components, only functional skills qualifications can be accredited within the QCF. In most circumstances we would therefore expect that learners register for, and achieve, separate relevant component qualifications covering Strand C. This does not, however, preclude any initiatives to co-deliver qualifications covering Strands A, B and C – see Section 2.4.

Note that the design principles specify the minimum level at which literacy, numeracy and ICT qualifications should be achieved. However, the design principles also allow the flexibility for the relevant SSC to prescribe a minimum level of achievement in each of these higher than the overarching minimum. Where SSCs wish to use this flexibility, they

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[4] Including consideration of 'interlocking' levels in design that aids progression from FLT, or on to full level 3.

should discuss their intentions with the QCA, the LSC and interested awarding bodies. It is expected that any such decisions will be made based on a clear understanding and articulation of the needs of learners and employers within the relevant sector area, and in particular how those needs reflect the knowledge, skills and understanding necessary to support sustainable employability. Any decisions to raise the overarching minimum in particular sectors, once agreed, will need to be recorded and clearly communicated by the SSC to all relevant awarding bodies and to the LSC.

1.8 Ensuring relevance in a changing business environment (ref: DP 4)

There will be no centrally specified timelines or methods for monitoring and evaluating full level 2 specifications/frameworks and component qualifications to determine their continuing value to the sector area. It is anticipated that sector skills agreements and sector qualification strategies will provide evidence to enable monitoring and evaluation, in line with ongoing developments in the design and accreditation of vocational qualifications being taken forward through the UK Vocational Qualification Reform Programme's Strand 1: Sector Qualifications Reform. The mechanisms by which these monitoring and evaluation methods operate will be agreed and implemented as part of the wider Sector Qualifications Reform work.

2. Delivery

The design principles apply to the design and combination of component qualifications representing full achievement at level 2. It is expected that advice and guidance including induction will inform learner choice, and that initial assessment will establish training needs.

2.1 Initial assessment and ongoing review of needs

Initial assessment will establish the learner's starting point and needs. It is anticipated that a learning and support plan will be identified with the learner and used to determine the learning required to meet identified needs and fulfil the requirements of component qualifications. It is expected that the appropriate learning programme, activities and assessment strategies will be developed to match the needs of learners and qualifications and/or units. These processes should ensure that a learner's previous learning experiences and accredited skills are identified and that there are also opportunities to accredit achievements, including the accreditation of prior learning, from the outset.

2.2 Prior attainment

Component qualifications included within full level 2 specifications/frameworks may specify entry criteria. Such entry criteria must link to and allow progression from entry level and/or level 1 qualifications and, in due course, from progression pathways within the foundation learning tier (when available). No overarching minimum entry requirements are set; however, consideration should be given to whether learners are appropriately equipped to undertake learning, achieve and progress at the level required within full level 2. Therefore, initial assessment and ongoing review are essential in ensuring that learners are on the right type and level of learning programme or activity, and that an appropriate starting point for each learner is identified against which their progress can be measured Any additional support needs should also be taken into account.

This should include ensuring that learners have the language, literacy and numeracy skills at a level appropriate to begin work towards the minimum achievement levels specified within full level 2 specifications/frameworks. For example, this may be reflected in the following entry requirements:

- literacy, entry level 2

- English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) skills for life, entry level 2

- numeracy, entry level 2.

Note that the above are included for guidance purposes only – there is no requirement that these are used.

Feedback to the consultation on design principles for full level 2 supported the view that learners should have English language achievement at a minimum of entry level 2. Where learners need to develop their language skills before embarking on full level 2, the training and support will be provided through other funding arrangements. Entry criteria should not force learners to undertake unnecessary lower level learning.

2.3 Achievement over time

The technical specification of the QCF allows the achievement of some or all of the necessary credits within component qualifications to be time-limited in line with the rules of combination. Organisations developing full level 2 specifications/frameworks may wish to consider whether there should be any time limits set relating to achievement of the specification/framework itself, additional to any requirements set for component qualifications.

Shorter time limits for achievement of particular units within component qualifications may be required in some sectors to ensure achievement remains credible in relation to factors such as changing legislation or to ensure currency of knowledge, skills and understanding. However, any decisions to set shorter time limits for the achievement of some or all credits need to be balanced by the consideration that inappropriate use of time limits may risk discouraging learners part of the way through programmes – particularly part-time learners who accumulate credit over time.

2.4 Delivery of knowledge, skills and understanding relating to each strand

Skills from Strands A and B may be developed and assessed through stand-alone units of assessment within full level 2 component qualifications. However, delivery should as far as possible be contextualised across the strands to ensure that the skills are developed in the context of the relevant sector area and add value to the experience for the learner.

Equally, although Strand C will most likely be covered through achievement of separate component qualifications, awarding bodies and deliverers may wish to consider how co-delivery with Strands A and B can help encourage learner achievement and progression.

3. Specification/framework approval and component qualification accreditation process

All full level 2 specifications/frameworks and component qualifications developed as part of the QCF fast-track will need to meet all of the design principles set out within *Design principles for full level 2 within the QCF fast-track*.

3.1 Accreditation of component qualifications

Component qualifications will need to be accredited by the qualifications regulators in the usual way. For component qualifications within the QCF, these will be accredited against the statutory regulations and the requirements in the technical specification currently in use for the QCF test and trials (as amended by the outcomes of the interim evaluation).

Awarding bodies should seek support[5] from the relevant SSC for any component qualification covering Strands A and B..

Where a full level 2 component qualification sits across more than one SSC footprint, awarding bodies should liaise with QCA sector officers in the first instance for advice on which SSCs to contact and how to proceed.

Component qualifications covering Strand C will be accredited by the qualifications regulators in the usual manner. It is anticipated that most of these qualifications will already be on the NQF. For further guidance on the accreditation of component qualifications covering Strand C (including functional skills qualifications) please email the QCA at frameworktestsandtrials@qca.org.uk.

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[5] Where qualifications covering Strands A and B are developed within the scope of the pilot of SSC 'approval' of vocational qualifications (running from October 2007 to July 2008), these qualifications will require 'approval' from the relevant SSC.

3.2 Web-based accreditation

Accreditation of new full level 2 component qualifications will operate via the web-based accreditation system, in the same way as for any other qualifications submitted for accreditation within the QCF as part of the fast-track arrangements.

However, qualifications recognised as contributing towards full level 2 (ie component qualifications) should also demonstrate how they meet the working version design principles. The web-based accreditation (WBA) system will be updated from October 2007 to include additional functionality relating to these additional requirements. However, in the interim, an MS Word-based form, including relevant questions relating to the full level 2 design principles (available on the QCA website), must be completed for each full level 2 component qualification and attached via the 'Need and Support' screen on the WBA system.

The information relating to the full level 2 design principles provided for each component qualification will not be used by QCA to inform any accreditation decisions (ie a qualification that doesn't meet the design principles will still be accredited so long as it meets the relevant statutory regulations); however, once agreed, this information will be sent by QCA to the LSC to help inform the process of aligning public funding with full level 2 provision that meets the design principles.

Further details on the revised fields within the web-based accreditation relating to full level 2, along with guidance on how to use these, will be sent out by October 2007. This guidance will also outline the requirements for '5-day approved' awarding bodies.

3.3 Development of full level 2 specifications/frameworks

It is expected that SSCs and awarding bodies will wish to liaise (ideally) before, or during the component qualification development process to discuss and agree, at a minimum, the following overarching areas for full level 2 specifications/frameworks:

- the expected minimum volume of total achievement in terms of numbers of credits to be achieved from Strands A and B, especially where the SSC sets a minimum size larger than the overarching minimum

- the expected minimum volume of achievement in terms of numbers of credits achieved from Strands A and B at level 2 or above, where the SSC sets an overall percentage of achievement at level 2 or above larger than the overarching minimum

- which relevant knowledge, skills and understanding from Strands A and B must be covered, and how this supports employability within the sector and aligns with ongoing Sector Qualification Reform work

- at which minimum level component qualifications relating to Strand C should be achieved, especially where the SSC wishes to set a minimum level higher than the overarching minimum specified within the design principles.

3.4 Approval of full level 2 specifications/frameworks

The design principles do not set any expectation for how full level 2 specifications/frameworks (that is, permitted combinations of component qualifications) should be approved and maintained, other than through the requirement that these are approved by the relevant SSC.

It is therefore up to SSCs to work with the LSC and SSDA to specify what mechanism they will use to record their expectations concerning full level 2 specification/framework development (as long as it covers the bulleted areas above), approval and maintenance. This mechanism will obviously need to be agreed with and communicated to relevant awarding bodies and to the LSC.

The LSC will need to be notified of the permitted combinations of component qualifications within full level 2 specifications/frameworks to prioritise funding. For each full level 2 specification/framework, SSCs should therefore maintain and communicate:

- a list of all accredited component qualifications covering Strands A and B, including permitted combinations of these

- a list of all component qualifications covering Strand C that can be combined with these.[6]

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[6] In compiling this list, SSCs may find it easier to first determine which accredited functional skills qualifications, or equivalent key skills or skills for life qualifications, *cannot* be included as components because they are at too low a level.

The SSDA and the LSC are able to provide advice and guidance as required on the most appropriate mechanisms for recording, approving and maintaining full level 2 specifications/frameworks.

4. Evaluation of the design principles (and associated guidance)

A mechanism has been developed for evaluating the appropriateness of the full Level 2 design principles being used as part of the QCF fast-track.

The evaluation will seek to determine stakeholders' views on the appropriateness of the design principles and associated guidance for developing full level 2 specifications/frameworks and component qualifications.

The evaluation will be conducted in the following two tranches:

Tranche 1: August–December 2007.

> ➢ SSCs involved in the second phase of the QCF test and trial which develop full Level 2 specifications/frameworks and component qualifications, and awarding bodies working with these SSCs.

Tranche 2: August 2007–June 2008

> ➢ SSCs that will develop full level 2 specifications/frameworks and component qualifications within the QCF fast-track, from August 2007, and awarding bodies working with these SSCs.

The rationale for the two-tranche evaluation approach is that it will elicit how the design principles have affected the process of developing full level 2 specifications/frameworks and component qualifications from inception to accreditation.

Field research will be conducted via structured questionnaires sent to all awarding bodies and SSCs included within each tranche. The questionnaires will be followed up with one-to-one structured interviews with all SSCs and a sample of awarding bodies.

Following the evaluation exercise, a final report by QCA, SSDA, LSC and DIUS will make recommendations as to whether any of the design principles (and associated guidance) should be amended in any way (or removed entirely), with a view to a final agreed policy on full level 2 within the QCF being operational from August 2008.

As part of its work in Sub Programme 3 of the UK Vocational Qualifications Reform Programme (Planning, Funding and Delivery of Provision for Learners), the LSC is undertaking modelling to evaluate the impact of the design principles on the level 2 public service agreement target and measurement of that target. In addition, the LSC is seeking to evaluate the benefits and risks of the design principles in the context of both meeting the trajectory set out for the level 2 target and the costs of supporting the design principles approach.

In the interim, before the evaluation exercise begins, organisations involved in developing full level 2 specifications/frameworks and component qualifications against the design principles are encouraged to record and collate their findings concerning the appropriateness of the design principles, with a view to sharing these with the QCA and LSC.

Annex: Model representing full level 2 specifications/frameworks

Key

A = Personal/social skills

B = Vocational skills

C = Literacy, numeracy and ICT

Exemplar full level 2 specification/framework

37 credits threshold

A&B1

+

C1   **C2**   **C3**

Group of 'approved' component qualifications that can be included within full level 2

Qualification component incorporating appropriate skills, at the right level from Strand C

Component qualification incorporating appropriate skills from Strands A and B

A&B1

A&B2   **C3**   **A&B4**

C2   **C1**

A&B3