



Post-Recognition Monitoring Report

Future™ Awards and Qualifications (Future)

January 2011

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Introduction

Regulating qualifications

The responsibility for regulating qualifications lies jointly with three regulators:

- Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation (Ofqual), the regulator for qualifications awarded in England and vocational qualifications awarded in Northern Ireland
- Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills (DCELLS), the regulator for Wales
- Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA), the regulator responsible for qualifications (other than vocational qualifications) awarded in Northern Ireland.

We systematically monitor awarding organisations and their regulated qualifications against the requirements set out in the statutory regulations. The aim of this activity is to promote continuing improvement and public confidence in the quality of regulated qualifications.

Where an awarding organisation is found not to comply with relevant criteria, the regulators will identify areas of non-compliance that must be rectified within a certain period. Even if an awarding organisation is compliant, the monitoring team may provide observations on ways in which the awarding organisation could change its systems and procedures to improve clarity or reduce bureaucracy.

Instances of non-compliance and observations arising from this monitoring activity are specified at the end of each section of this report. Awarding organisations are required to produce an action plan to show how they will deal with any non-compliance issues identified. We will generally agree the action plan and monitor its implementation.

We will use the outcomes of monitoring and any subsequent action taken by awarding organisations to inform decisions on future monitoring and/or the possible imposition of sanctions.

Banked documents

As part of the awarding organisation recognition process, the regulators require awarding organisations to submit certain documents to Ofqual, to be held centrally. Information from these 'banked' documents is used to inform monitoring activities and may also affect an awarding organisation's risk rating.

A suite of documents has been identified as suitable for banking, consisting of those items considered to be the most crucial in supporting an awarding organisation's ability to operate effectively. To maintain the currency of the banked documents, awarding organisations are responsible for updating them as and when changes occur. They are also reminded to review them at least annually as part of the self-assessment return.

About this report

This report is the outcome of a monitoring activity on the awarding organisation Future™ Awards and Qualifications (Future) that was carried out by Ofqual in January 2011. It draws together the regulators' findings on areas of:

- management and governance
- resources and expertise
- diversity and equality
- development of units and rules of combination (RoC) for qualifications
- design and development of assessment
- delivery of assessment
- centre recognition.

This is the first post-recognition monitoring activity on Future in respect of the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) since the awarding organisation received supplementary recognition in April 2010.

The monitoring activities included desk research based on information already held by the regulators, examination of Future's QCF recognition application and scrutiny of the awarding organisation's website. The regulators' monitoring team visited Future's head office to conduct interviews with staff and review documentation. A member of the team also attended a standards verifier's training event.

This report draws together the regulators' findings from these monitoring activities.

About Future

Future offers a range of regulated qualifications, the majority of which are in the fields of health and safety, first aid and coaching. More information on Future can be found on its website; www.Futurequals.com.

Management and governance

Subject to the *Regulatory Arrangements for the Qualifications and Credit Framework* (2008), paragraphs 2.1–2.3, 5.1 and 5.17.

Findings

1. Future is a private limited company owned by a number of shareholders. The Chief Executive Officer (CEO) is one of the shareholders and is the main driver of the awarding organisation.
2. The awarding organisation has undergone a significant transition in order to reap the benefits of the emerging QCF and to reflect the resultant changes to the market. To enable Future to develop, the CEO took the opportunity to adapt by reviewing and expanding the organisation's provision to offer a much broader portfolio of qualifications within the bounds of its in-house expertise.
3. One impact of this expansion was that there was a need to review Future's governance arrangements. Formerly the CEO undertook several other key roles across the organisation. These included Head of Education, Head of Business Development and accountable officer responsible for maintaining the quality and standards of the qualifications offered.
4. In reviewing its arrangements, Future has recently restructured and redefined some internal roles for senior staff. It has appointed a new Head of Compliance and Quality Assurance, with the former post-holder being appointed as Head of Education. The new Head of Education has also taken on the role of the accountable officer. This new structure has been formed to allow the CEO the flexibility to manage the organisation's corporate functions and to take a more strategic role.
5. The CEO has retained the role of Head of Operations, which encompasses business systems and sales and marketing. This is intended to be a short-term post with plans to fill the role in the Future.
6. Following this restructure, Future will need to review and update its documented job specifications and submit these to the Regulatory Information Technology System (RITS). It should also submit the new organisation chart.
7. Future's governance arrangements include provision for one committee – the Qualifications Committee. The terms of reference state that the committee is made up of key members of internal staff including Head of Education, Head of Qualifications and Head of Compliance and Quality Assurance, along with any other relevant parties when required. Integral to this committee is the position of Head of Regulation which is fulfilled by an external consultant. The powers and

responsibilities of the committee are wide and varied, but the main purpose is to ensure the qualifications are robust and fit for purpose, and to manage the associated quality assurance processes.

8. In practice, the Qualifications Committee has not yet met, as the external consultant who has been working with Future has not been available to commit to the role demanded by the terms of reference. However, Future has identified a different consultant who will be able to take on this role in the coming weeks. This independent element is key to the health of the organisation.
9. Future needs to implement and review its Qualifications Committee. This includes reviewing the terms of reference to clarify its focus and purpose as well as its membership, taking account of the restructure.
10. In the meantime the internal senior staff have met regularly, although this has been informal. We were shown documented notes of these meetings. While the notes record what was discussed, they do not record any actions or outcomes. Therefore the awarding organisation does not have any audit trail for any key decisions made in relation to its management and operations.

Non-compliance

1. Future must inform the regulators of the changes to its single named point of accountability.

(Regulatory Arrangements for the Qualifications and Credit Framework (2008) criteria 2.1b)

2. Future must formalise its governance arrangements to ensure it has appropriate management structures in place to control the delivery of regulated qualifications.

(Regulatory Arrangements for the Qualifications and Credit Framework (2008) criteria 2.1c)

Observations

1. Future should review and amend the job roles and responsibilities for its key staff, as well as its organisation chart, to reflect the recent restructure, and should submit this information to RITS.

Resources and expertise

Subject to the *Regulatory Arrangements for the Qualifications and Credit Framework* (2008), paragraphs 2.4–2.6, 3.1, 4.1, 5.2, 5.5 and 5.6e.

Findings

1. Future employs five permanent members of staff, including the Chief Executive Officer, Head of Centre Support and Head of Qualifications. The Head of Education and Head of Compliance and Quality Assurance are employed on a fixed-term contractual basis. Other roles, including Head of Regulation, standards verifiers and qualification and assessment developers are undertaken as and when required by individuals retained on a contractual basis.
2. Future's corporate services, including human resources, information technology (IT), sales and marketing and finance, are outsourced to external service providers.
3. We looked at a set of accounts detailing Future's income and outgoings for the previous financial year. Future also provided a set of minutes for meetings conducted between the CEO/Head of Education, the Head of Compliance and Quality Assurance and the Head of Qualifications in relation to the strategic direction of the organisation. We were satisfied that Future has the capacity for the expansion of its operations in the short to medium term. It was noted that Future does not currently operate a formal, documented business review and planning process; however, staff did indicate that such a process was due to be introduced over the coming year as part of Future's 12-month plan of activities.
4. Future maintains a set of detailed person specifications and job roles for staff involved in the performance of its regulated functions. There is a documented process in place for the recruitment and selection of Future staff members and associates.
5. The duties, selection criteria and performance management arrangements for standards verifiers are clearly documented. Future holds details of relevant qualifications and evidence of continuing professional development (CPD) for each of its standards verifiers in individual files. These details are in the process of being uploaded to its online system for managing its awarding activities.
6. In preparation for the delivery of its portfolio of new qualifications Future has expanded its pool of contracted standards verifiers from 3 to 20, from which it has appointed 5 'lead' standards verifiers and a 'lead' centre risk assessor. Future needs to update its person specifications to cover these new roles.

7. Future has hosted a series of training events for its new standards verifiers to introduce them to the QCF. The events included Future's policies on credit accumulation and transfer (CAT) and recognition of prior learning (RPL). We looked at records of attendance and details of the topics covered, including specific standardisation exercises. We also saw a 12-month plan of activities that included training and standardisation events to be delivered in the coming year, indicating the date, target attendees and topics to be covered.
8. Future has invested in a bespoke IT system to support the administration of learners and centres and to enable the performance management of staff involved in the delivery and quality assurance of assessment. The system is specifically tailored to QCF qualifications and enables Future to accurately and quickly identify the point at which learners complete the requirements of a rule of combination. The system is managed and hosted by a third party and can be accessed remotely.
9. Future has arrangements to ensure that its IT systems are secure, recoverable and fit for purpose to support its regulated functions as an awarding organisation. There are contingency plans in place to ensure business continuity in the event of an emergency or disaster. These include remote working in the event that offices are inaccessible. When reviewing its business planning processes Future should also ensure that its IT strategy and arrangements for business continuity are formally documented.

Non-compliance

3. Future must revise the defined person specifications and job descriptions for staff involved in the delivery of assessment, to include the new and updated roles created as part of the restructuring of its organisation, for example those of lead standards verifiers.

(Regulatory Arrangements for the Qualifications and Credit Framework (2008), paragraph 5.5)

4. Future must formalise its business review and planning processes. This should include having a formal overarching strategy to provide for financial, human and technical resources to meet current and Future demand and maintain business continuity.

(Regulatory Arrangements for the Qualifications and Credit Framework (2008), paragraphs 2.4–2.6)

Observations

There are no observations in relation to this section.

Diversity and equality

Subject to the *Regulatory Arrangements for the Qualifications and Credit Framework* (2008), paragraphs 2.11–2.14.

Findings

1. Future has an Equal Opportunities Policy and a Diversity and Equality Policy, both available on RITS. The former document was out of date and had been superseded by the latter document, which was drawn up to meet the requirements of the QCF. The documents need to be reviewed and consolidated as having two separate documents could cause confusion.
2. For its staff and associates Future has procured an online training package on diversity and equality. Completion of the programme is mandatory for all staff and associates.
3. As Future has not developed its own units/qualifications or RoC, there are some elements of the Diversity and Equality Policy for the QCF that could not be tested.
4. There does not seem to be a formal method for consulting with Future learners or learners' representatives that could feed into the development process. Although it is too soon for Future to seek feedback on the new suite of qualifications it is about to introduce, it would be good practice to consider ways in which information can be sought to inform future development and review.
5. Future has, however, considered the needs of its centres and learners in the delivery of its units/qualifications. This has included allowing centres some flexibility in how they assess the practical observations and to have some choice in sourcing appropriate evidence, for example log books. Future also offers reasonable adjustments and additional methods of assessment to suit the needs of individual learners.

Non-compliance

There are no instances of non-compliance in relation to this section.

Observations

2. Future should review and consolidate its equal opportunities policy documents and submit a revised document to RITS.

3. Future should consider ways in which it can consult with learners to inform future unit/qualification and RoC development and review.

Development of units and RoC for qualifications

Subject to the *Regulatory Arrangements for the Qualifications and Credit Framework* (2008), paragraphs 3.2, 4.2, 4.3a–f and 6.2a.

Findings

1. All of Future's QCF units have been developed in partnership with the relevant sector skills council (SSC). The rationale for the units and RoC is also set by the SSC. The SSC sets up development groups, consisting of interested awarding organisations, to develop the units and RoC. Future has submitted two units on behalf of the SSC for the Level 2 Award in Paediatric First Aid.
2. Future explained the development process that took place for the Level 2 Award in Paediatric First Aid. The qualification was originally part of the National Qualifications Framework and was completely rewritten to be submitted to the QCF. This development was carried out during the QCF test and trials to the working specification that was available at that time. Market research and interrogation of the unit databank was undertaken by the SSC. There was still evidence of demand for the units and they also needed reviewing to meet the requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage. Guided learning hours, levelling and credit values were determined through group discussions within the relevant development groups.
3. Evidence was presented that demonstrated that Future was fully involved in the development process for these units. We saw a series of emails that tracked the development, including feedback, consultations and decisions of all those involved. Ultimately the SSC reviews and signs off the units.
4. Future has documented procedures for the development of units and RoC. These procedures include a flow diagram showing the stages of development, a written process detailing exactly what happens at each stage and a checklist to ensure compliance with all QCF criteria. These procedures meet the QCF requirements, but as all current development is through the SSCs, they have not yet been used and so cannot be tested at this time.
5. Future also has procedures in place to review units and RoC. The procedures state that unit and RoC reviews will be carried out every two years, unless an issue is raised and then the review will take place as required. As yet these procedures have not been tested as the units have only been delivered since September 2010. However, Future has identified the need for an early review of the units to look at the guided learning hours and to remove any ambiguity. Future, as the unit submitter, will take the lead in making any amendments, and will ratify them with the SSC and any other relevant awarding organisations.

Non-compliance

There are no instances of non-compliance in relation to this section.

Observations

There are no observations in relation to this section.

Design and development of assessment

Subject to the *Regulatory Arrangements for the Qualifications and Credit Framework* (2008), paragraphs 5.3a–g, 5.4 and 5.16a.

Findings

1. Future uses shared existing units and designs its qualifications with pre-determined RoC. Future decides on appropriate assessment methods to ensure that the assessment criteria and learning objectives are met.
2. Previously, Future qualifications were externally assessed through examination. An outcome of the review of qualifications for the QCF is that some units now contain elements of internal assessment that is externally verified. This is a new form of assessment for Future to offer.
3. For example, historically the two paediatric first aid units that make up the Level 2 Award in Paediatric First Aid were assessed together using one multiple-choice test. In light of a review of the qualification to meet QCF requirements, each unit can now be assessed separately through a combination of multiple-choice examination and practical assessment.
4. Unit 1 of the qualification assesses the candidates' skills based on their knowledge, while Unit 2 enables a demonstration or illustration of this knowledge.
5. Future has considered the manageability and cost-effectiveness for centres by offering more flexibility in how they are assessed.
6. The range of new Future qualifications is being launched in early Spring 2011. Future is committed to launching the new qualifications and the new assessment methods for internal assessment with all the supporting quality assurance arrangements in place and it has taken the time to develop these. However, as these qualifications are not yet launched we could only review draft documents and could not test any of the new quality assurance systems that are being put in place to deliver these.

Non-compliance

There are no instances of non-compliance in relation to this section.

Observations

There are no observations in relation to this section.

Delivery of assessment

Subject to the *Regulatory Arrangements for the Qualifications and Credit Framework* (2008), paragraphs 5.5–5.6, 5.9–5.10, 5.16b and 5.20–5.23.

Findings

1. The new qualifications offered by Future are assessed using a mix of externally set and marked multiple-choice examinations and/or internal assessment that is externally verified. The specifications for individual Future qualifications clearly identify the assessment method and evidence requirements that apply to each learning outcome of every unit included in the rule of combination. Future has procedures in place to ensure that the assessment instruments for both of these methods are produced to the required quality standard.
2. Future procures the services of suitably qualified and experienced individuals to develop questions for its multiple-choice examinations. Each question is mapped to a specific assessment criterion. There are three possible questions for each assessment criterion for each learning outcome to be assessed by way of a multiple-choice examination. This means that at any given time there are three versions of a multiple-choice examination paper that can be offered to a learner. Individual questions and complete examination papers are reviewed and signed off prior to delivery. Currently they are signed off by the CEO, but Future procedures state that sign off should be undertaken by the Qualifications Committee. Future should consider who will be responsible for sign off when it reviews the role of the Qualifications Committee. All multiple-choice examination papers are revised and replaced annually.
3. Examination papers are printed on-site by Future and individually sealed prior to secure delivery to centres upon demand. Centres must notify Future two weeks prior to hosting a multiple-choice examination. This allows Future to print and issue examination papers and also to carry out any checks on centres to ensure that they are meeting Future's requirements for the delivery of its examinations. Completed scripts are returned to Future for optical marking. Results are checked to ensure accuracy and consistency and then sent to the centre.
4. As stated in the previous section of this report, the quality assurance arrangements for the internally assessed elements of Future units are new and have not yet been implemented. The following paragraphs describe the system that has been put in place, but we were not able to test these arrangements.
5. For those units and/or learning outcomes that are assessed by practical demonstration, centres will be required to submit details of their proposed assessments to a designated standards verifier for approval prior to delivery.

This process is carried out using a web-based IT system that allows decisions to be audited; such decisions will be subject to regular review and reported on by the Head of Compliance and Quality Assurance.

6. Future requires its centres to register its learners with the organisation for a specified period of time prior to the award of credit or a qualification. Future's arrangements for the invigilation of its examinations require learners to produce formal identification before entering the examination venue. All internal assessment decisions must be agreed and signed by the learner and the assessor and countersigned by the internal verifier. These arrangements ensure that assessment evidence produced by learners is authentic.
7. Future will use its new team of standards verifiers to externally verify the delivery of its assessments by its approved centres. Each centre will receive a visit from its designated standards verifier at least twice a year. During a visit the standards verifier will check to make sure that the centre and its staff are meeting the requirements set out by Future for assessing its qualifications. As part of this process the standards verifier will look at a sample of assessment evidence to ensure that the assessment and internal verification processes are operating to the required standard. Following each visit the standards verifier will produce a report detailing any issues that need to be addressed.
8. Standards verifiers are required to attend a number of training events each year. The training events organised by Future include standardisation activities to ensure that its units are assessed accurately and consistently across awards, centres and over time. At the time of monitoring, three such events had taken place to upskill the new team. A member of the monitoring team attended one of these events and was able to confirm that these activities took place.
9. All new standards verifiers will be accompanied on their initial visits by an experienced Future member of staff or lead standards verifier to ensure that they are operating consistently and to the standard required by Future.
10. The Head of Compliance and Quality Assurance will review all visit reports produced by the standards verifiers and produce a report for the Qualifications Committee on a quarterly basis. All standards verifiers will be subject to an annual performance review; this process ensures that development needs are identified and any requirements for CPD or further training are noted as actions to be addressed within an agreed timeframe. If a standards verifier fails to complete such agreed actions their contract may be subject to termination or passed over for renewal.
11. Future requires all standards verifiers to declare any potential conflicts of interest as part of the application process. This information will be monitored by the Head of Compliance and Quality Assurance using the dedicated IT system.

12. Centres approved to deliver Future awards are required to retain sufficient evidence of learners' work and assessment decisions to allow them to be monitored over time. Centres are required to retain assessment plans, evidence of internal verification and copies of learners' handbooks.
13. Future maintains a comprehensive policy on RPL. It requires its centres to interview all potential learners to assess their suitability for the proposed programme of study and to identify any relevant prior learning or achievements. Centres are provided with template forms to complete in order to capture evidence of learners' prior achievements or learning. Future provides details of available exemptions in the specification for each of its qualifications. Where a learner has evidence to support a claim for an exemption, centres can log this through Future's IT system. Any centre found to be in breach of this policy by a standards verifier will have its 'direct claims' status removed.
14. The RPL policy was explained to the standards verifiers at their team meeting, which was attended by a member of the monitoring team. We consider that Future's approach to dealing with RPL is good practice.
15. Unless an approved centre has attained 'direct claims' status, Future will not award any credits or qualifications certificates prior to a review of a sample of assessment evidence being undertaken by a standards verifier. This procedure ensures that awards made by Future are accurate and consistent.
16. The regulators were given a demonstration of the IT system that Future has in place to manage its procedure for awarding credit and qualifications. All claims for awards are submitted by centres via the IT system. This allows Future to track the progress of learners towards their target awards and to manage the awarding process effectively. All of Future's units are given a pass or fail result – they are not graded.
17. Certificates are printed on site by Future. Procedures are in place to ensure that individual certificates are identifiable and to ensure that certificates cannot be duplicated. The sample credit certificate seen could be revised to make it clearer that the credit awarded can be counted towards any regulated qualification.

Non-compliance

There are no instances of non-compliance in relation to this section.

Observations

4. Future should consider redesigning its credit certificates to ensure that the title of the unit, for which credit is being awarded, is sufficiently prominent in relation to the title of the target qualification towards which the learner is studying.

Centre recognition

Subject to the *Regulatory Arrangements for the Qualifications and Credit Framework* (2008), paragraphs 5.11, 5.16b and 5.18.

Findings

1. Future has approximately 30 approved centres and has robust procedures in place for the recognition of centres. Potential centres request approval and are sent an approved centre application form and guidance document.
2. The application forms are returned to Future where they are reviewed by the Head of Compliance and Quality Assurance before a centre visit takes place. A monitoring visit is carried out by a standards verifier using the *Standard Verifier Report Form* to check compliance at centre level. The report is reviewed by the Head of Compliance and Quality Assurance prior to approved centre status being granted.
3. Future has reviewed and amended its centre approval forms to meet the requirements of the QCF. All current approved centres are being required to complete these as part of a re-approval programme. For example, the new form allows centres to confirm that they are able to obtain Unique Learner Numbers.
4. All centres use Future's web based IT system to securely register learners, upload assessment results and claim certifications. The system allows for the collection of other learner information, including date of birth, ethnic origins and disabilities. Centres can also enter information about events such as courses and assessments onto the system.
5. Centre application forms are uploaded and stored on the system along with any notes, for example any quality assurance issues. Future plans to develop a centre risk assessment which will also be incorporated in to the IT system currently being used.

Non-compliance

There are no instances of non-compliance in relation to this section.

Observations

There are no observations in relation to this section.

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