Post-Recognition Monitoring Report

Mineral Products Qualifications Council

November 2010

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Contents

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 Mineral Products Qualifications Council (MPQC) awarding organisation that was carried out by Ofqual in November 2010. It draws together our findings on areas of:

- management and governance

- resources and expertise

- diversity and equality

- development of units and rules of combination (RoC) for qualifications

- unit/qualifications development – design and development of assessment

- delivery of assessment

- centre recognition

- awarding and certification.

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

The monitoring activities included desk research of information already held by us, examination of MPQC's supplementary recognition application, and scrutiny of the awarding organisation's website. The regulators' monitoring team visited MPQC's head office to conduct interviews with staff and review systems and documentation.

This report draws together our findings from these monitoring activities.

About MPQC

MPQC offers a range of qualifications in the QCF. The majority of these relate to the extractive and mineral processing sector. For more information on MPQC and the qualifications it offers please see www.mp-qc.org

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. The Mineral Products Qualifications Council (MPQC) is a private limited company by guarantee without share capital. MPQC's awarding organisation is one of two sections, which form the single company MPQC. The other section is the MPQC skills centre responsible for training and the delivery of some qualifications for MPQC's awarding organisation and other awarding organisations. Both sections have separate reporting structures to the Main Board of MPQC, sharing IT service support and finance systems.

2. We were shown the operating and committee structure for the awarding organisation, but neither of these showed its position within the overall MPQC structure. However, we noted that pictorial representations of the positioning of the awarding organisation were included in the proposed changes to governance submitted to Ofqual in 2008.

3. The General Manager reports directly to the Main Board of the MPQC. This board includes representatives from industry and trade associations, and meets quarterly. The main functions of the board are to formulate and agree policies, oversee the day-to-day operation of the awarding organisation and to set the strategic direction of the MPQC company. The Council is the advisory body to the Board, with a remit to look at the needs of industry.

4. However, the committee structure in relation to the awarding is different to those submitted to and agreed by us in 2008. It shows the Main Board of MPQC with the Council and the Proskills Industry Group reporting directly to it. Further discussions revealed that the membership of the Council and the Proskills Industry Group is the same. Meetings for both usually occurred on the same day at different times, and to save members time it was agreed by both organisations to have joint meetings. However, it is not clear if other awarding organisations from this sector are invited to these meetings.

5. The committee structure shows three committees reporting to the Council and the Proskills Industry Group; the Training and Education Committee (TEC), the Quality Management Committee (QMC), and the Proskills Qualifications and Reform Committee (PQRC). The QMC looks at, for example, awarding organisation performance, provides industry and technical expertise, and receives reports on malpractice, reasonable adjustments and appeals. The TEC as a sub-group of the Council focuses on the skills and qualification

requirements, and makes recommendations to the Council, which would pass them onto the Board. We noted that, within the terms of reference for the TEC, the membership included representation from one of the sector skills councils (SSCs), and this could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

6. We asked why the PQRC was included on the committee structure, as this is an SSC group and we would not expect to see any reference to an SSC within an awarding organisation's reporting arrangements. The General Manager confirmed that the PQRC does not report directly to the Council. It is an SSC forum, which is open to all organisations and any feedback from the PQRC is fed back to the Proskills Industry Group. We acknowledge the close relationship MPQC has with the SSC and understand the reasoning for running joint meetings. However, the current pictorial representation of the relationships between the committees is confusing and could potentially be considered to represent a conflict of interest. We looked at minutes of meetings and it is not clear if other awarding organisations are invited to or represented at these meetings. The awarding organisation will need to review its position so that any conflicts of interest are suitably managed.

7. The General Manager of MPQC is the single named point of accountability for maintaining the quality of the regulated functions, but the roles and responsibilities outlined in the job description do not reflect this requirement.

8. We noted that an additional person from MPQC was seconded from October 2010 to assist the awarding organisation until the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) qualifications were converted to the QCF. This appointment has since been ratified by the Board.

9. MPQC works with the Concrete Society to develop units and qualifications. We looked at the 'Contract of Services' between both organisations and are satisfied that the roles and responsibilities of each are clearly documented.

10. MPQC stated that its fees had not been reviewed for some time but were due for review in October 2010.

Non-compliance

1. MPQC must review the pictorial representations of its committee structures so that they are transparent. Where potential conflicts arise in relation to SSC collaboration and joint meetings the awarding organisation must have a conflict of interest policy explaining how this is managed.

   (*Regulatory Arrangements for the Qualifications and Credit Framework* (2008), 2.2)

Observations

1. MPQC should amend the job description of the General Manager so that it is clear he/she is the single named point of accountability responsible for maintaining the quality of the regulated functions.

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. MPQC has two full-time staff at its head office and two contracted external verifiers. A finance manager is employed by MPQC with responsibility for all financial aspects of the company. However, we consider that the General Manager has a large workload in terms of overseeing all QCF development, quality assurance and servicing the committees.

2. We recognise that MPQC operates in a specialist sector and is well supported by industry. The General Manager stated that MPQC is regarded as a service to industry and is not a profit-making organisation.

3. There is a formal appraisal process in place for head office staff, which includes mid-year and annual appraisals. There are suitable arrangements for recruiting external verifiers, which include an interview and induction process. External verifiers are also required to declare any conflicts of interest in the 'Contract for Provision of Services'.

4. The awarding organisation uses external experts to develop units and/or qualifications where applicable and explained that, being in a niche market, it is aware of the key people with suitable expertise. These experts are nominated from companies and MPQC decides who to use, but this does not follow a formal process, nor is it documented.

5. We asked how MPQC ensured that when it developed units, its staff, contracted staff and experts had sufficient expertise in the development, review and assessment of units, qualifications and RoC. MPQC put together a training programme for The Concrete Society (TCS) based on information provided by the Federation of Awarding Bodies (FAB) and documented guidance from the Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency (QCDA). Staff from the awarding organisation have also attended relevant FAB and QCDA events.

6. We asked if MPQC had arrangements in place for business continuity and disaster recovery. There is a 'Disaster and Planning Policy', which describes what happens if the building has to be evacuated or IT facilities are disrupted. All data is backed-up daily to servers off site and is managed by an external organisation.

Non-compliance

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

Observations

2.   MPQC should review its staff resources so that it is confident it can fully manage the regulated functions.

Diversity and equality

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

Findings

1. MPQC has a documented 'Diversity and Equality Policy', which meets the requirements of the QCF arrangements relating to equalities legislation. It is reviewed by the General Manager to ensure that updates from the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) and the FAB are included. MPQC also consults with its staff about diversity and equality issues through its 'Equal Opportunities and Access Policy and Guidance' contained in the 'Quality System Manual'.

2. The awarding organisation requires centres to have an equal opportunities policy and systems for monitoring, reviewing and taking action to resolve identified issues when required. All centres sign to confirm they will accept MPQC's 'Equal Opportunities and Fair Access Policy' during the centre recognition process.

3. External verifiers monitor whether or not centres are adhering to MPQC's diversity and equality policy during external verification visits. MPQC's 'Equal Opportunities and Access Policy' is available to centres via the *Centre Handbook*.

4. All competency-based units/qualifications awarded by MPQC are open to learners who can demonstrate that they carry out the job-related tasks. MPQC's 'Equal Opportunities and Access Policy' clearly states that unless there are legal constraints, discrimination issues such as gender, race etc will not affect the assessment, verification or certification of learners. However, it is not clear how MPQC's considers equality and diversity issues during the development of units and qualifications, or questions for multiple-choice-questions. There is no documented process in place.

5. MPQC consults with learners in a variety of ways – by using members of the MPQC expert working groups who were previously learners and collecting feedback from learners during external verification visits. In addition, MPQC has recently used telephone interviews to discuss the assessment process with learners. Feedback from the pilot of Sustainable Concrete and Onsite Concrete Practice with learners resulted in questions being amended as the level was too high.

6. MPQC monitors its 'Diversity and Equality Policy' through the annual review of statistical data held in the database. The data is collected via the learner

registration process and includes data relating to equalities legislation. MPCQ produces reports based on this data for the QMC about three times per year. Although MPQC can evaluate data relating to learners it is not clear how it will monitor and evaluate its compliance with paragraphs 2.11 to 2.13 of the *Regulatory Arrangements for the Qualifications and Credit Framework* (2008).

Non-compliance

2.   MPQC must have a documented procedure explaining how it considers diversity and equality during the development of units and qualifications.

   (*Regulatory Arrangements for the Qualifications and Credit Framework* (2008), paragraph 2.12)

3.   MPQC must have a documented procedure explaining how it monitors and evaluates its compliance with paragraphs 2.11–2.13.

   (*Regulatory Arrangements for the Qualifications and Credit Framework* (2008), paragraph 2.14)

Observations

3.   MPQC should consider how it can fully describe the mechanisms used to consult with learners in identifying barriers to learning and assessment.

Development of units and RoC for qualifications

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

Findings

1. The majority of qualifications awarded by MPQC use units that have been developed by the relevant SSC and have pre-determined RoC. These units are based on national occupational standards (NOS) and are used in a number of licence to practice qualifications. MPQC works closely with some SSCs to develop these units but also uses units from other organisations in the RoC.

2. MPQC responds to employer/industry requests. For example, it has worked with The Concrete Society to develop qualifications in Onsite Concrete Practice, with British Precast to develop the Sustainable Concrete Award, with Tarmac for the non-operational qualifications and with Aggregate Industries for the Asphalt Production qualifications. In all instances the subject-specific expertise was provided by those organisations and the training or support in unit writing by MPQC.

3. There is a documented procedure for developing units and RoC. Requests for new qualifications are considered by the TEC and put forward to the Council for agreement. At this point the proposal is also presented to the SSC for support and approval.

4. MPQC forms a working group with the external organisation led by an MPQC staff member. If there are no relevant NOS the awarding organisation devises a functional map before interrogating the data bank for suitable units. If no units exist the working group will develop the RoC and new units based on the functional map.

5. For the above QCF qualifications MPQC staff drafted the unit with learning outcomes and assessment criteria with input from the working group. The General Manager confirmed that the appointment of a secondee would provide support to the awarding organisation for future developments and for transferring existing qualifications onto the QCF.

6. We looked at the qualification development file and saw evidence of email dialogue on assessment criteria and learning outcomes. Completed draft units are circulated to the working group for review. Level is assigned after the units are agreed and MPQC bases its decisions on Annex E of the QCF arrangements.

7. Similarly, credit is determined through group discussion. All decisions are based on working group consensus. The initial determination of credit looks at three components: guided learning hours, the time an average learner would take to be competent, and the time taken for assessment. It is not clear if the working group takes into account that credit is determined by the learning time to achieve the standard determined by the assessment criteria, as this is not covered in the written procedure. The General Manager confirmed that MPQC uses the Proskills credit rating pack, which uses this approach. MPQC checks the level and credit of units against similar units in the data bank to ensure accuracy and consistency.

8. The group also considers pathways, levels and combination of units to make up the RoC. Exemptions are identified where units within a qualification replicate existing NVQ units. The RoC design aims to utilise shared units to maximise credit accumulation and transfer.

9. Completed units and RoC are sent to key stakeholders in the industry for review. Feedback is considered and any changes to units or RoC are made by the working group. The units and RoC are checked by the General Manager before feedback from the TEC, MPQ Council and PQRC We looked at the process followed and could not find any evidence of how MPQC ensures that the design features of Section 1 of the QCF requirements are met. It is also not clear why completed units are sent to the PQRC for consultation. The SSC's role is usually to support or approve the make-up of the qualifications at an early stage, not develop them. However, the General Manager stated that this was to ensure that a qualification meets the needs of the Sector Qualification Strategy (SQS).

10. We noted that the latest version of the MPQC 'Procedure for the Development, Submission and Ongoing Review of QCF units', September 2010, shows that the TEC/PQRC carry out the final sign-off of units. The awarding organisation confirmed that the General Manager signs off the completed units.

11. The General Manager maintains a spreadsheet of all MPQC qualifications and units with review dates. The intention is to collect feedback about the delivery and assessment of awards via external verifier visits and feedback logs. The working group for each qualification will then review whether or not the RoC and units are meeting industry needs. The outcome of the review will be reported to the QMC and a summary will be given to centres and the SSC if the units are NOS-based. As none of the QCF units/qualifications are due for review it was not possible to test the effectiveness of this process.

Non-compliance

4. MPQC must have a documented procedure, which clearly shows how the design features of Section 1 have been met during the development of units and RoC.

    (*Regulatory Arrangements for the Qualifications and Credit Framework* (2008), paragraphs 3.2e and 4.3c)

Observations

4. MPQC will need to consider who will take responsibility for drafting units for QCF qualifications and the resources required.

5. MPQC should consider reviewing its procedure for determining credit.

6. MPQC should consider using one of the committees to sign off completed units and RoC so that independence between the development and review of these regulated functions is guaranteed.

Design and development of assessment

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

Findings

1. We asked MPQC how assessment methods for QCF units and/or qualifications were chosen. Where assessment relates to the NOS MPQC has to adhere to the relevant SSC assessment strategy. However, for qualifications developed by MPQC the working group is responsible for agreeing the assessment method/s to be used.

2. MPQC uses two main methods of assessment; observation for competency-based qualifications and multiple-choice questions for knowledge-based units/qualifications. For example, the On-site Concrete Practice qualification is tested using multiple-choice questions, which was the assessment method agreed by the working group. Information on the assessment method for each qualification is included on the 'Qualification Data Sheet'.

3. MPQC held training sessions with subject experts from TCS on how to write questions to meet the learning outcomes for the On-site Concrete Practice qualification. These questions were sent to suppliers for consultation and piloted with learners before the test paper was finalised. Feedback confirmed that some of the questions were too challenging for the level. These were amended and signed off by TCS.

4. The bank of questions is still in the development phase. Currently there are enough live questions to run a test. We asked how MPQC selected questions for the test paper and ensured that all the learning outcomes for the unit are met. MPQC confirmed that it will keep a schedule of the questions used on each date and that there are a number of questions linked to each learning outcome. MPQC does not have any formal systems for analysing the performance of questions, but it intends to introduce this in the future.

5. The awarding organisation encourages holistic assessment across job functions for competency-based qualifications, but each unit can still be assessed individually.

6. MPQC designs the units so that they are standardised and promote reliable and consistent judgements. There is a generic learner pack and the awarding organisation has worked hard to ensure that the units are cohesive, effective and cost-efficient for centres by covering the relevant work functions to be assessed.

7. MPQC intends to review its procedures for the design and development of assessment as part of its annual or bi-annual review. There is a spreadsheet to record all reviews, but it was not possible to test the effectiveness of the review procedures at this stage as the awarding organisation has not gone through a full cycle of QCF qualifications.

Non-compliance

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

Observations

7. MPQC should consider using software for statistical analysis to measure the performance of questions used in multiple-choice question tests.

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 5.20–23.

Findings

1. MPQC has clearly-defined expertise and qualification requirements for all staff involved in the assessment process. These requirements are agreed with industry experts and based on the relevant assessment strategy as determined by the SSC. MPQC approves assessors and internal verifiers to assess or verify either individual units and/or qualifications depending on their expertise. This is a robust process.

2. Most of the units/qualifications offered by MPQC are competency-based, and derived from the NOS. Therefore, assessment is against learning outcomes and assessment criteria based on the job functions. Units can be assessed individually, although holistic assessment is encouraged.

3. We asked how the assessment instruments and tasks for the Sustainable Concrete and On-site Concrete Practice qualification were developed. MPQC confirmed that it inherited the assessment tasks in the form of an independent test prior to its recognition for the QCF. The awarding organisation has reviewed the existing multiple-choice questions and re-written the paper, but does not have a documented procedure explaining how it ensures the quality of these assessment tasks.

4. MPQC has systems in place to check the identity of candidates for multiple-choice question tests, confirm the authenticity of candidate evidence, and ensure that centres retain records of assessment decisions and candidate evidence. Information on these requirements is contained within the *Centre Handbook*.

5. We asked MPQC how it ensured that assessment and verification staff did not have a personal interest in the assessment at the centre and what would happen if this could not be avoided. MPQC confirmed that assessors and internal verifiers were expected to declare conflicts of interest but that this was not formally requested. We noted that external verifiers are required to declare conflicts of interest via their 'Contract of Services'.

6. Staff at MPQC confirmed that the recognition of prior learning (RPL) was not appropriate for its sector but did allow exemptions that would be recorded on the database under a learner's details.

7.   MPQC has provided its centres with a series of emails about the migration of qualifications from the NQF to the QCF. Additionally, seminars have been run about the requirements of the QCF, the changes to existing qualifications and the new standards.

8.   The awarding organisation continues to use an NVQ model of external verification to ensure accuracy and consistency in standards across units and qualifications for competency-based qualifications. External verifiers meet twice a year to standardise assessment and any issues identified at centres are fed back to the QMC and centres.

9.   There are systems in place to monitor the work of external verifiers. These checks include accompanied visits and monitoring of external verification reports. The General Manager checks the written reports and accompanies external verifiers to monitor their performance. The awarding organisation also has an additional staff member with the expertise to carry out this role.

10.   The awarding organisation has procedures in place to review its arrangements for the delivery of assessment.

Non-compliance

5.   MPQC must develop written procedures explaining how it ensures the quality of assessment tasks/questions for multiple-choice question tests or any other form of independent assessment.

(*Regulatory Arrangements for the Qualifications and Credit Framework* (2008), paragraph 5.6a)

6.   MPQC must develop a procedure, which requires staff involved in the assessment and/or verification process at all levels to identify any conflict or personal interest.

(*Regulatory Arrangements for the Qualifications and Credit Framework* (2008), paragraph 5.9)

Observations

There are no observations in relation to this section.

Centre recognition

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

Findings

1. MPQC has suitable arrangements for recognising and monitoring centres. External verifiers are responsible for centre recognition and the ongoing monitoring of centres through scheduled visits. Centres are also required to inform the external verifier of any changes to centre staff.

2. The centre recognition process is based on a site visit and completed application form. External verifiers check that centres have adequate management systems, staff and resources to meet its centre approval criteria, which are based on the NVQ approval process. If the criteria are met the external verifier recommends approval and this is signed off by the General Manager. If the criteria are not met an action plan is agreed.

3. Centres have to agree to specific conditions, such as nominating a single named point of accountability, and allowing access to premises. This is clearly indicated in the application form for centre approval.

4. Staff resources, expertise and centre systems to support the assessment and verification of units/qualifications are checked via the external verification process twice a year.

5. MPQC has a secure password-protected area for centres on the website. Once approved, centres receive a username and password, which allows them access to the database to register and request certificates for learners. We were shown the database in operation and are satisfied that assessment results are securely transmitted to MPQC.

6. MPQC is a learner registration body and its database is linked to the Learner Record Service and can obtain unique learner numbers on request. The awarding organisation encourages centres to access its learners' previous records and this requirement was confirmed in centre workshops.

7. The awarding organisation does ask centres to have arrangements in place for recognition of prior learning, although it stated there would be very few instances of this happening. This requirement is detailed in the 'Centre Manual' and is checked as part of the approval process.

8. MPQC has suitable arrangements to track learner progress through its database, which records units by learner. Centres also confirm at the approval phase that they have systems to track learner progress.

9. As MPQC has recently been recognised as a QCF awarding organisation we were unable to test the effectiveness of some of these requirements at this stage of the monitoring activity.

Non-compliance

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

Observations

There are no observations in relation to this section..

Awarding and certification

Subject to the *Regulatory Arrangements for the Qualifications and Credit Framework* (2008), paragraphs 5.12 – 5.15, 5.16 c-d and 5.19

Findings

1. The QCF arrangements require awarding organisations to have systems in place to determine when learners have achieved a credit or completed the RoC for a qualification so that certificates can be issued.

2. Some centres have direct claims status (DCS) and can claim units/certificates on completion, including exemptions against completed NVQ units where applicable. However, centres without DCS have to wait until after the external verification visit and confirmation from the General Manager before certificates are claimed. Centres are only granted DCS status if the external verifiers are satisfied with their quality assurance arrangements.

3. Centres claim for either individual units or full qualifications. All achieved units are securely uploaded to the MPQC database and the credits awarded are recorded against each learner. The online system has additional checks to ensure that valid claims for full certificates are made. For example, there is a ten-week default date and some units have specific performance evidence dates of up to 26 weeks before evidence can be considered, and any claim before this date would be rejected. The database also identifies when the RoC for a qualification has been completed. We saw the database in operation and are satisfied with the checks made.

4. We asked what arrangements were in place to review and adjust results for multiple-choice-question tests if errors in questions were identified. Currently, there are no formal systems in place to review and adjust results. MPQC stated that any such questions would be checked and reviewed using industry experts and referred to the QMC.

5. MPQC's performance target for issuing credit or full certificates is 10–15 days, but they are usually sent within five days. The General Manager checks all claims before certificates are issued.

6. There are suitable arrangements for issuing replacement certificates, which include, for example, checking learner names, dates of birth and centre names against existing records. Centres complete a form and send the request to MPQC.

7. The awarding organisation stated that it benchmarks standards against the NOS and uses the external verification process to ensure the comparability of

Non-compliance

7.   MPQC must have formal procedures in place to review and adjust results.

(*Regulatory Arrangements for the Qualifications and Credit Framework* (2008), paragraph 5.12c)

Observations

8.   MPQC should consider how it will ensure the comparability of standards over time for multiple-choice-question tests.

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