Post-Accreditation Monitoring Report

Food and Drink Qualifications (FDQ)

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 Food and Drink Qualifications (FDQ) awarding organisation and was carried out by Ofqual in September 2010. 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

- awarding and certification.

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

The monitoring activities included desk research of information already held by us, examination of FDQ's recognition application, and scrutiny of its website. The regulators' monitoring team visited FDQ's head office to conduct interviews with staff and review documentation. Centres were also visited.

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

About FDQ

FDQ was formerly known as Food and Drink Qualifications and changed its name in April 2010. FDQ belongs to the Meat Training Council Group. FDQ awards qualifications across a wide range of food related activities. For more information on FDQ, visit its website at www.fdq.org.uk.

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. FDQ is a wholly owned subsidiary of the Meat Training Council Group. Consolidated accounts are produced for the Meat Training Council Group. FDQ is a company limited by guarantee and a registered charity. At the time of monitoring, the company had recently changed its name from Food and Drink Qualifications. FDQ had kept the regulators fully informed of the change.

2. FDQ is the awarding arm of the Meat Training Council. FDQ is governed by a board (the NVQ and VRQ Awards Board) that reports to the main Board of the Meat Training Council. FDQ's chief executive, who is the single named point of accountability for all the regulated functions, has control of FDQ's day-to-day activities and reports to FDQ's Board.

3. The awarding organisation is supervised by the NVQ and VRQ Awards Board. It monitors the quality assurance of all FDQ's qualifications, both regulated and unregulated. We looked at minutes of the Board and were satisfied that proper enquiry was being made, and adequate control exercised, over its regulated activities.

4. FDQ provided the regulators with an organisation chart of jobs and job-holders as well as a chart of the Meat Training Council Group structure.

5. There is no joint awarding activity. FDQ has participated in unit development activity for the QCF, with its sector skills council (SSC). FDQ provided us with a partnership agreement in respect of unit submitting and RoC development between itself and its SSC. This identified FDQ as the lead organisation responsible for quality assurance. The agreement is time-bound up to the end of 2010, or earlier depending upon certain events occurring, such as the SSC receiving QCF recognition. We were satisfied with the content of the agreement.

6. We did not find any evidence of potential conflicts of interest at FDQ.

7. FDQ provided us, in confidence, with details of its policy on fees. We were satisfied with the information provided.

Non-compliance

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

Observations

There are no observations in relation to this section.

Resources and expertise

Subject to the *Regulatory Arrangements for the Qualifications and Credit Framework* (2008), paragraphs 2.4–2.5, 3.1, 4.1 and 5.2.

Findings

1. FDQ provided us with the audited accounts of the Meat Training Council for 2008 and 2009. The auditor's report was unqualified (that is, satisfactory).

2. FDQ has five staff in its head office and employs many others to act as external moderators and assessment and unit creators. We examined relevant job descriptions and person specifications and were satisfied with their content.

3. We discussed the procedures FDQ has to ensure that its staff and associates have the necessary expertise in the design and development of units and RoC for the QCF.

4. FDQ provided us with a list of staff and associates. This set out the experience of the person named in the areas of expertise under the headings of

   - QCF unit writing

   - QCF unit credit and levelling

   - QCF RoC.

   The list also indicated the relevant training courses attended, for example at the Federation of Awarding Bodies.

5. FDQ had worked with its SSC and various consultants in developing units and RoC for the QCF. Information gleaned at training courses at the Federation of Awarding Bodies, Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency (QCDA) and the SSC were cascaded to other staff.

6. Training had been provided in-house on an ad hoc basis in addition to the external training that was taken up. Guidance was written and competencies defined. Some time was taken to define what the term 'average learner' meant. Difficulties with diversity and equality for assessment had been discussed and resolved in the context of the food industry.

7. As an existing awarding organisation, FDQ could evidence sector and subject expertise. It could also evidence assessment and awarding expertise at the qualification level. FDQ's staffing is very stable, with few changes over the years, but it has broadened its base of unit writers to help with how credit would be awarded and the unit assessed as part of the design of the unit.

8. Assessment is mainly portfolio-based, internally assessed by centres and externally moderated. There are also end-test papers. FDQ has produced a glossary to assist its centres with the terms used.

9. To date, FDQ has only developed two units of its own from scratch:

   - Principles of HACCP Based Food Safety Systems

   - Knife Sharpening and Maintenance.

10. FDQ has, however, developed its own documentation, e.g. templates for unit developers and creators of RoC to use, and procedures to support them. We considered that these, together with related documents, evidenced the expertise that FDQ has developed in addressing the QCF requirements. FDQ's agreement with its SSC insisted that they use FDQ's documentation and procedures in their collaboration.

Non-compliance

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

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. FDQ has a written diversity and equality policy, which all staff sign-up to on induction to the organisation. This policy also forms part of the centre handbook, although centres must create their own diversity and equality policy to enable them to become recognised by FDQ.

2. FDQ has taken the opportunity that the QCF brings to review its diversity and equality skills, and every member of staff, including external verifiers and moderators, has received updated training and a guidance booklet.

3. Diversity and equality are reviewed annually by consultants brought in by FDQ to keep the organisation up–to-date with legislation. The quality and accreditation manager is ultimately responsible for managing diversity and equality and ensuring compliance.

4. FDQ has systems in place to embed diversity and equality into units during the development stages. Once the initial proposal has been made it goes to consultation where it is verified against criteria, which include diversity and equality criteria. Feedback is recorded and any potential barriers to learning are identified and, where appropriate, removed. The units are then rechecked and signed off by the awarding body director or the quality and accreditation manager.

5. Consultations take place with employers, providers and colleges to gain diversity and equality information from learners prior to unit development. External verifiers also collect learner feedback twice a year. FDQ also carries out a monthly random learner sampling activity to obtain direct feedback from learners. This is a confidential activity and gives learners the opportunity to comment on centres as well as on qualifications and units. This information is then reviewed and fed back to the SSCs and centres, as appropriate.

6. There are procedures in place to apply reasonable adjustments, where required. Centres fill out a request form on behalf of the learner and attach relevant evidence to it (for example, a medical certificate). These forms are sent to FDQ where they are checked and signed off by the quality and accreditation manager before being returned to the centre. FDQ records all cases of reasonable adjustments and these are subsequently reviewed by its Awards Board.

7.   Data is collected on gender, ethnicity and age. This data is recorded and put in to a profile that states the percentages of each group in relation to the units and qualifications. This is then reviewed by the Awards Board, which identifies areas where they might promote units/qualifications to under-represented groups.

Non-compliance

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

Observations

There are no observations in relation to this section.

Development of units and RoC for qualifications

Subject to the *Regulatory Arrangements for the Qualifications and Credit Framework* (2008), paragraphs 3.2–3.3 and 4.2–4.4.

Findings

1. FDQ has a procedure in place to identify and establish the demand for its qualifications and units. This involves:

    - interaction with approved centres and employers at regularly hosted regional meetings

    - dialogue with relevant SSCs regarding their sector qualifications strategy

    - outcomes from FDQ's annual review of its qualifications and units

    - reviewing labour market information.

    FDQ has developed a flowchart to provide an overview of the procedure.

2. Qualification and unit development is undertaken by the Senior Quality Systems Administrator, with oversight from the quality and accreditation manager and the Awarding Organisation Director. The awarding organisation director is responsible for reporting to the FDQ Awards Board on proposed qualifications and units for development.

3. The purpose and rationale for proposed new developments are documented and circulated for comment and consultation to the FDQ Awards Board, which includes representatives from training providers and employers. These proposal documents are also used to inform early dialogue with relevant sector skills councils and circulated more widely for consultation among FDQ's centres.

4. We were presented with evidence of how the procedure had been followed in relation to qualifications: a Level 3 qualification titled Food Manufacturing Excellence and Enterprise and two units, one for knife skills and another in hazard analysis critical control point (HACCP –a systematic approach to food safety), all of which were undergoing development at the time of our visit.

5. In each case there was a clearly documented audit trail detailing discussions with the relevant sector skills council and consultation with training providers and industry members. Copies of minutes from meetings of the FDQ Awards Board were filed, together with clear cross-referencing to relevant discussions regarding the initiation and ongoing progress of the developments.

6. We were also presented with a detailed 'Transition Plan' for migrating FDQ's qualifications from the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) to the QCF. The plan covered 16 qualifications, together with their current status and proposed dates for the launch of their QCF replacements. Some qualifications listed were already available in the QCF. The majority were due to be launched in Autumn 2010, with the remainder to be launched in Spring 2011. The minutes indicated that the Transition Plan was regularly reviewed by the Awards Board.

7. FDQ has put in place a partnership working agreement with Improve – the sector skills council for the catering and hospitality industry. Accordingly, FDQ operates two slightly different procedures for unit development and submission to the unit databank; one for the development of its own units and another for the development of units in partnership with others.

8. FDQ has in place clearly documented and robust procedures for the development and ongoing review of units and RoC to form part of QCF qualifications. The overall procedure documents set out the different stages of development, review and quality assurance, and identify relevant roles and responsibilities for their implementation.

9. Both procedures are supported by a development checklist used to record details of the individuals responsible for, and involved in, the development. It also records the dates on which each stage of the process is completed and references to audit documents for each stage of the process.

10. The procedure documents are also cross referenced to other supporting documents, including a continually updated list of suitably qualified individuals to develop QCF units and RoC. The cross referencing also includes the development templates used for drafting and reviewing units, and RoC and for capturing and refining the rationale for their development.

11. Both the flowchart of the procedure to identify demand for units and qualifications, and the procedures for the development of units and RoC, indicate that the unit databank is interrogated at the outset of any development activity.

12. The regulators looked at completed audit documents for specific units and RoC, including correspondence with the relevant SSC. This indicated that the unit databank had been interrogated as part of the development process; however, there was no facility on the unit development checklist to record when the interrogation had taken place or who had undertaken it.

13. A key feature of FDQ's development procedures is the establishment of a consultation group for each development activity, to include members of the FDQ Awards Board, individuals with expertise in the design and development of

QCF units and RoC, representatives of the relevant sector skills council, and representatives of industry and approved FDQ centres.

14. Members of the consultation group are required to review first and subsequent iterations of units and RoC using a development consultation questionnaire. The questionnaire poses detailed and probing questions based on the requirements of the QCF design specifications and requires respondents to give substantive written responses.

15. During our visit, we saw examples of completed development questionnaires that provided insightful and detailed comments on draft units and RoC. In particular, we noted that the questionnaire allowed for detailed feedback to be captured on issues such as:

    - the language used in assessment criteria

    - the opportunity for credit transfer and accumulation generated by RoC

    - the credit and level profile of RoC

    - implications for assessment management and delivery, including additional assessment requirements

    - issues relating to the accessibility of proposals, and other diversity and equality considerations.

16. FDQ's arrangements for ensuring that the credit value and level of units are determined accurately and consistently require that a credit and level template be completed by the individual appointed to produce the first draft of the unit. A further copy of the template is completed by a second appointed individual in relation to the same unit.

17. Where there is a difference in the credit value or level, a working party is established by the project coordinator, including representatives of the sector skills council and industry, to review the possible reasons for the difference and arrive at an agreed credit value and level. This comprehensive approach to ensuring consistency and accuracy of the level and credit value of units is an example of good practice.

18. All proposed units and RoC, together with a completed development checklist and supporting audit documents, are reviewed and signed off by the quality and accreditation manager at FDQ. Where the quality and accreditation manager has been personally responsible for any aspect of the unit development, sign-off is then required by the awarding organisation director.

19. Finally, the development checklists are used to record the individual responsible for submitting the unit or RoC to the QCF databank and the date on which this was completed.

20. During our visit, we were presented with well-organised audit trails showing how the documents outlined above had been completed appropriately and stored on file. We were satisfied that the procedures in place were robust, fit for purpose and ensured that FDQ's approach to the development of units and RoC is managed and documented effectively.

21. FDQ has put in place a partnership agreement with the sector skills council, Improve, to support its submission of QCF units and RoC until such time as Improve gains regulatory approval to do so independently. Under the terms of the agreement, Improve has agreed that from 1st July 2010 it will use FDQ's procedures and documentation for developing units and RoC. The partnership arrangement provides for a two-tier sign-off process, initially by Improve and subsequently by FDQ.

22. Evidence was presented to us to clearly demonstrate that each unit submitted as part of this process had been independently reviewed by FDQ, with detailed comments provided to indicate any aspects that required amendment. The final review undertaken by FDQ also included a review of all the supporting documentation completed by Improve as part of the development process. FDQ's comments related not only to the quality of the units themselves, but also to the way in which the audit trail for each unit had been completed.

23. FDQ also provided documents relating to the review of units developed by Improve prior to 1st July 2010 using its own internal quality assurance documents. Again, there was clear evidence that a comprehensive review had been undertaken of the units themselves and of the audit trail for each unit.

24. FDQ undertakes a review of all its units and RoC on an annual basis. The review is undertaken by an appointed project coordinator and overseen by the quality and accreditation manager. This activity is supported by a continually updated review timetable.

25. A key feature of the review process is a formal questionnaire sent to all centres, employers and external verifiers responsible for the delivery of the units and RoC in question. The questionnaire asks respondents to consider whether the unit or RoC continues to be fit for purpose, and requires written responses to a series of detailed questions based on the requirements of paragraphs 3.3 and 4.4 of the *Regulatory arrangements for the Qualifications and Credit Framework*. The questionnaire also asks for suggestions on ways in which the unit or RoC could be improved.

26. Existing units and RoC are also discussed at regional meetings held at least annually with FDQ's approved centres. In addition, FDQ undertakes an internal review of the take-up and ongoing regulatory compliance of its qualifications, including their associated RoC and units.

27. The outcomes of all these activities are collated by the Project Coordinator. The quality and accreditation manager then reviews them and produces a report outlining any required actions for consideration by the FDQ Awards Board. Any required changes or additions to units and RoC are undertaken in accordance with FDQ's development procedures outlined above.

28. We looked at documents relating to the recent review undertaken by FDQ of its Level 2 Award for Proficiency in Poultry Meat Inspection (QCF). From these it was clear that procedures had been followed and all relevant documentation had been completed and filed. The review also took advantage of feedback resulting from a review of units undertaken by the QCDA.

29. The file pertaining to the review included copies of minutes from a meeting of the FDQ Awards Board held on 20th July 2010 at which the outcomes of the review were presented and discussed. As an outcome of FDQ's review, minor amendments to the wording of the learning outcomes and assessment criteria of some of the units were suggested. The audit trail also included records of correspondence with the relevant SSC relating to these changes. There was also correspondence on the development and implementation of a communication plan to inform all users of the qualification about the proposed amendments.

Non-compliance

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

Observations

1. FDQ should consider including an additional section in its development checklists for units and RoC, to capture the date on which the unit databank was interrogated and by whom this was undertaken.

Design and development of assessment

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

Findings

1. As part of the procedures for identifying a need and rationale for proposed new developments, and during the consultation and review stages of the development process, FDQ seeks feedback from stakeholders on the proposed assessment methods for its units and RoC. The regulators looked at evidence of approved centres providing feedback on the assessment of proposed qualifications to ensure that appropriate and manageable assessment methods were developed and to minimise the need to make subsequent reasonable adjustments.

2. Following sign-off and finalisation of units and RoC, FDQ has a procedure for implementing its qualifications prior to launch. This includes the development of appropriate assessment methods and materials. The procedure is supported by a checklist used to record details of the individuals responsible for completing the different stages of the procedure.

3. At the time of our visit, the QCF qualifications offered by FDQ were assessed predominantly through multiple-choice question papers.

4. We looked at implementation documents for the FDQ Level 2 Award for Food Safety in Catering. These provided a clear record of how different aspects of the qualification had been developed and signed off. There was a list of qualified examiners and moderators, an agreed price list, a tutor training pack and a set of arrangements for the assessment of the qualification signed off by the lead examiner.

5. The documents we looked at included a detailed audit trail for the development of a bank of questions to support the production of multiple-choice question papers. As part of the process, individuals are commissioned to write three questions for each learning outcome.

6. Question writers use a standard template that requires them to set stem questions and distracters, using a mix of positive and negative statements. These draft questions are reviewed and moderated by the awarding body administrator and chief moderator. Question writers' performance is managed as part of this process.

7. We looked at implementation documents for the FDQ Level 3 Certificate in Food Manufacturing Excellence and Enterprise. Feedback during the

development of the qualification indicated that the preferred assessment method would be by way of written assignments of between 750 and 1,000 words, giving learners opportunities to demonstrate experience gained in the workplace. We also looked at a brief for developing assignments, together with a marking key to include cross-referencing to the relevant learning outcomes and assessment criteria. Where assignments and marking keys are developed by centres, they must be submitted to FDQ for approval prior to delivery.

8.   FDQ does not offer any qualifications that are graded. All assessment of units results in a pass or a fail.

9.   As mentioned in the previous section of this report, FDQ has in place arrangements for reviewing its provision on an annual basis. As part of this activity, the assessment methods of its qualifications are reviewed together with the units and RoC.

10.   Overall, we were satisfied that FDQ has in place an appropriate set of procedures to ensure that the assessment methods for units are in accordance with the requirements of the QCF arrangements.

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 and 5.16b.

Findings

1. FDQ operates two main models of assessment delivery: one based on internal assessment and external verification, the other based on externally set examination papers and assignments that are internally marked and externally moderated. For ease of reference, FDQ refers to these as the 'NVQ model' and the 'VRQ model' of assessment. For both models it has well documented procedures setting out in detail the respective roles and responsibilities and lines of accountability for staff and associates involved in the delivery of assessment.

2. FDQ maintains four key documents to manage and oversee its arrangements for the delivery of assessment, all of which have been revised and updated to incorporate the regulatory requirements of the QCF. There are two operating manuals; one for external verifiers and another for examiners and moderators. There are also two centre handbooks setting out policies and procedures: one for internally assessed qualifications and the other for externally moderated exam papers and assignments. FDQ also maintains a comprehensive set of job descriptions for staff responsible for the delivery of assessment.

3. The examiner and moderator operating manual sets out the person specifications and recruitment procedures for all staff involved in the development, quality assurance, marking and moderation of exams and assignments, together with detailed operating procedures for each role. The manual also sets out the required quality standards for the production of examination papers together with a detailed end-to-end procedure, with guidance for setting questions and developing marking keys. Emphasis is placed on the need to cross-reference each question to a specific learning outcome.

4. The manual also sets out in detail the process for the moderation of question papers and marking keys prior to their delivery. Any assessment materials, whether developed by FDQ staff and associates or by centres, including multiple-choice questions, short-answer questions, assignment-based questions, and marking keys, are scrutinised by moderators and signed off by the chief moderator before they are delivered.

5. After examinations have taken place, the chief moderator will moderate a sample of completed assignments and test papers and provide feedback to the

relevant centre. This is done to ensure that the assessments are of the required quality and can support accurate and consistent assessment judgements over time, and across centres, learners and awards. Where inconsistencies or other issues are identified, the sample will be increased. If necessary, the whole tranche of assessments will be remarked and moderated.

6.   The external verifier operating manual sets out the job description and person specification for external verifiers and lead external verifiers, together with terms of engagement. As part of their verification activities, external verifiers must ensure that arrangements for the delivery of assessment at centres comply with the requirements of paragraph 5.6 of the *Regulatory Arrangements for the Qualifications and Credit Framework*. External verifiers are also responsible for sampling learner portfolios and observing assessment practice as part of their external verification visits. They comment and report on all activities observed. These reports are all reviewed by the lead external verifiers, or the quality and accreditation manager, to ensure accuracy of the annual risk-rating of centres.

7.   The performance of external verifiers is monitored by way of an annual observation undertaken by the quality and accreditation manager or the Lead external verifier. The quality and accreditation manager has overall responsibility for the process and for reporting the outcomes of these activities to the FDQ Awards Board. External verifiers are also required to attend a minimum of two training days a year. These training days give an opportunity to standardise external verifier scrutiny of assessment activities and learner portfolios.

8.   The performance of moderators and examiners is monitored by the chief moderator, lead examiners and the quality and accreditation manager. The performance of the chief moderator and lead examiners is monitored by the quality and accreditation manager. Where serious concerns about the performance of an examiner or moderator are identified the matter is reported to the FDQ Awards Board for a decision on whether to terminate the examiner's contract. Examiners and moderators are contractually obliged to attend training days. These training days include guidance on ensuring standardisation of practice.

9.   Wherever possible, the outcomes of these performance-management activities are used to inform the focus of training days. We looked at comprehensive records of training delivered and were satisfied that FDQ had in place effective procedures to ensure that people involved in the assessment process are adequately supported and receive suitable training in order to fulfil their roles.

10. Specific information and guidance relating to exemptions and provision for recognition of prior learning is included within FDQ's individual qualification specifications. Where a learner or a centre wishes to make a claim for an

11. Provision for recognition of prior learning varies according to the nature of the qualification in question. The procedure for developing and marking assignments allows for learners to include evidence of relevant experience gained at work. The internal assessment model allows learners and tutors flexibility to match evidence of the learner's prior experience to the requirements of the unit or qualification.

12. Each model of assessment used by FDQ is subject to external scrutiny by external verifiers or by examiners, all of whom must, under the terms of their contracts, keep FDQ updated on any conflicts of interest.

13. FDQ does not currently offer any of its qualifications in any language other than English. FDQ indicated that it had no plans to develop assessments in any other language at the time of monitoring.

Non-compliance

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

Observations

There are no observations in relation to this section.

Centre recognition

Subject to the *Regulatory Arrangements for the Qualifications and Credit Framework* (2008), paragraph 5.11.

Findings

1. FDQ explained its system of centre recognition. We found it complicated by FDQ's division of centre approval, not just between approval as a centre and then subsequent recognition for particular qualifications, but also into centres approved for QCF units that were competence-based and those that were not. In addition, QCF approval had been carried out differently for existing centres and new centres.

2. We asked to be taken through the processing of actual applications. It became clear that not all centres had provided the information requested. FDQ said that areas of uncertainty would be clarified on the first external moderator's visit. This is unacceptable since recognition is being given either ahead of all information being provided or on a conditional basis; neither scenario is in line with the regulatory arrangements.

3. We also noticed that FDQ was relying upon the absence of negative information in other awarding organisations' external moderation reports as evidence of a prospective centre meeting the regulatory requirements. When we challenged one such instance on the basis that there was no way of telling whether the centre was recognised for the QCF by the other awarding organisation, FDQ conceded that this was an inappropriate way of confirming compliance.

4. FDQ's centre approval application is capable of producing the evidence required for a decision to be made on whether centre approval should be given, but it needs to be completed in all cases. Where centres refuse to provide information, approval must not be given.

5. FDQ staff seemed uncertain over the way in which unique learner numbers could be obtained by centres. We offered to put staff in touch with appropriate information providers.

Non-compliance

1. FDQ must revise its centre approval procedures and practice to ensure that it knows at the point of approval that a centre meets the requirements of the *Regulatory Arrangements for the Qualifications and Credit Framework*.

Observations

2. FDQ should clarify its understanding of how unique learner numbers are obtained and ensure this information is passed to its centres.

Awarding and certification

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

Findings

1. FDQ has secure procedures in place to award learners' achievement. Centres complete learner results forms, which are then emailed to FDQ so that information can be entered on the internal IT system. In the case of external examinations, the papers are sent to FDQ, where they are marked, and then the results are entered on to the system. The system then automatically indicates when enough credits have been achieved and/or when a RoC for a qualification has been achieved.

2. External examination papers go through a random sampling process where a second examiner marks a selection to ensure consistency. If an error is found it is referred to the Chief Moderator who will check the sample papers and, where necessary, re-mark a whole batch of papers and make amendments.

3. We were shown examples of credit and qualification certificates. The titles on some certificates were not the same as the titles of qualifications/units held on the National Database of Accredited Qualifications. FDQ must check its systems immediately to ensure this is corrected.

4. FDQ confirmed that credit certificates are supplied on demand to learners without delay. Qualification certificates are issued on successful completion of the RoC for a qualification.

5. Certificates are kept in a locked cupboard and only specific FDQ employees are able to print them.

6. Learners have to provide evidence of their identity at registration. There are subsequent checks of this initial information to authenticate learners by matching the name, learner number and qualification/unit title before awarding and certification takes place. FDQ also completes a monthly candidate authenticity activity where samples of learners' details are checked. If inconsistencies emerge then these are referred back to the centre for clarification and, where necessary, investigation.

7. The system for one-day assessments was, due to its fast throughput, not as secure. FDQ should consider giving guidance to its centres on what constitutes acceptable identification.

8.   If a replacement certificate is requested, learners must provide the original, which is then destroyed before the replacement is provided. In the absence of the original certificate, the replacement certificate is clearly marked as a replacement. This should be done in such a way that removal of the word 'replacement' is difficult. The current design could be improved to facilitate this.

9.   If no original certificate is provided, FDQ carries out checks to ensure the application is genuine. This includes checking the learner's address and date of birth, and may also include requests for further evidence. FDQ stated that most requests come directly from centres.

10.   Each certificate, including replacements, has a unique number, which incorporates the learner number.

11.   FDQ does not grade its QCF qualifications.

12.   FDQ carries out monthly quality checks and awarding and certification is reviewed as part of this process. All findings are reported back to the Awards Board for review and comment.

13.   FDQ ensures comparability year on year, across centres and qualifications by carrying out annual risk ratings on centres and completing action plans where necessary. FDQ's external verifiers also carry out reviews of centres, units, qualifications and learners. These processes will be applied to the QCF.

Non-compliance

2.   FDQ must ensure that its credit and qualification certificates contain the information required in the form approved by the regulators.

   (*Regulatory Arrangements for the Qualifications and Credit Framework* (2008), paragraphs 5.13a, 5.15a, annexes C and D).

Observations

3.   FDQ should consider whether the word 'replacement' can be accommodated within the design of its certificates to ensure removal is less easy.

4.   FDQ should consider providing its centres with guidance on acceptable forms of identification, particularly for its one-day assessment courses.

We wish to make our publications widely accessible. Please contact us if you have any specific accessibility requirements.

First published by the Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation in 2011