



# **Post-Recognition Monitoring Report**

## **Royal Horticultural Society (RHS)**

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October 2010

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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 Royal Horticultural Society (RHS) awarding organisation that was carried out by Ofqual staff in October 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 RHS in respect of the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) since the awarding organisation received supplementary recognition in March 2010.

The monitoring activities included desk research of information already held by us, examination of the Royal Horticultural Society's (RHS') supplementary recognition application and scrutiny of the awarding organisation's website. Our monitoring team visited the RHS head office to conduct interviews with staff and review documentation.

This report draws together our findings from these monitoring activities.

## **About RHS**

The RHS is a world leading horticultural organisation and a garden charity. It offers a range of regulated qualifications for both professional horticulturists and keen gardeners. For further information about RHS and the qualifications it offers, visit its website at [www.rhs.org.uk](http://www.rhs.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. The RHS is governed by its Council and Director General. The Director of Science and Learning is the single point of accountability for the awarding organisation reporting to the director general.
2. The RHS qualifications and awarding organisation functions sit within the learning and communities department of the RHS alongside other educational activities. Currently the post of Head of Learning and Communities is vacant.
3. Day-to-day management of the awarding organisation is delegated to the head of accreditation and qualifications. The head of accreditation and qualifications, in addition to his own duties, is also carrying out the role of acting head of learning and communities. RHS is reviewing this role within the organisation structure and it is likely that the responsibilities of the post will be split between the two main areas of education activity. The qualifications and administrative functions will be in one area with the community horticulture, schools programmes and outreach education services in the other. This separation will strengthen the identity of the RHS qualifications within the organisation.
4. The main committee of RHS qualifications is the qualifications advisory committee (QAC), which was established in 2008. The terms of reference state that the purpose of the QAC is to provide advice to the RHS on its qualifications, including their relevance to the industry and the quality of their content and delivery. It meets twice a year. Membership includes representatives from the horticultural industry, professional associations and education. The chair of the QAC sits on the RHS Council and the head of accreditation and qualifications acts as the secretariat.
5. Minutes of the QAC were made available to the monitoring team and demonstrated that the members are kept fully up to date with the work of the awarding organisation and that they have active involvement in their advisory capacity. Evidence included presentations on the new Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF), and notes of discussions around the potential for QCF qualifications, as well as their impact and implementation.
6. The monitoring team considers that RHS has clear lines of accountability and reporting which are communicated to all staff.

7. It has a conflicts of interest policy whereby if any member of staff (or their family members) or professional associate is involved in training or taking RHS qualifications this must be declared.

### **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 2.4–2.6, 3.1, 4.1, 5.2, 5.5 and 5.6e.

### Findings

1. The RHS qualifications team has eight members. This includes two who job-share. As well as the Head of Accreditation and Qualifications other key staff are the quality assurance officer and the principal examinations officer. There is also a qualifications development and support officer who is employed on a fixed-term contract to manage the development of the new, practical QCF qualifications.
2. The RHS has an annual business plan that is approved by the Council. Objectives identified from the business plan are cascaded to individual departments and are also linked to individual staff development and appraisal systems.
3. Internal teams meet monthly. A standing agenda item for team meetings is to review any potential risks to operations or delivery for the coming month. The members of staff who usually job-share are able to work increased hours to cover peak periods or staff absence.
4. The Head of Accreditation and Qualifications and the principal examinations officer attended qualifications and curriculum development agency (QCDA), federation of awarding bodies and sector skills council (SSC) events and read guidance documents to obtain knowledge relating to the QCF. A point of good practice is that the person responsible for reviewing units for fair access also attended some of the workshops.
5. Information gathered at these events was disseminated to internal staff, professional associates and centres through a variety of training events and workshops. RHS staff demonstrated a good understanding of the ethos of the QCF and of the wider implications for its use.
6. RHS contracts with a team of professional associates to provide the expertise for many of its regulated functions. In all there are about 120 professional associates used in a number of roles, including unit and RoC developers, question writers, examiners, internal and independent moderators, centre approval verifiers and external verifiers.
7. Most professional associates come from within the industry or professional bodies. Many also undertake multiple roles for RHS across its regulated functions.

8. There is a clear process for the recruitment and selection of professional associates. The duties, person specifications, selection criteria and administration of professional associates are clearly documented.
9. All professional associates involved in unit/RoC development are provided with a set of QCDA guidance documents as well as training.
10. An outcome of the QCF has been a review of the qualifications offered. RHS has developed a new qualification that includes practical assessment that is internally assessed and externally verified. This has led to the appointment of a team of 12 external verifiers and a senior external verifier.
11. RHS carried out one training event for external verifiers in September 2010, with another planned for November. All external verifiers must attend the training before they carry out the role. Initial centre visits will also be attended by the senior external verifier.
12. Evidence of training activities was seen by the monitoring team. However, there was no evidence of staff or professional associates being provided with information, training or guidance on diversity and equality. This is particularly relevant for centre approval verifiers and external verifiers who visit centres that are required to have suitable equal opportunities policies and systems in place. RHS should consider how it will promote diversity issues across the organisation and how it will keep its staff and associates updated, for instance with regard to the new Equalities Act.
13. Another gap identified relates to training for centre approval verifiers and external verifiers on how to check centres for QCF readiness.. For example, centres are required to have arrangement for credit accumulation and transfer. Verifiers need to have an understanding of what it is they are approving or monitoring.
14. Training for all professional associates is relevant to their role. RHS keeps records of the attendance of professional associates at training events, which is good practice.
15. Performance management systems are in place for the majority of professional associates, covering the use of standardisation, marking and sampling procedures. Examiner performance records are kept for those involved in each examination. Depending on their role, professional associates are monitored through their line management; this could be the senior examiner, principal examinations officer, an independent moderator or the Head of Accreditation and Qualifications. They are also subject to a re-contracting process on a yearly basis. It was noted that there is no documented monitoring process in place for the senior external verifier.

16. RHS uses two IT systems, an internal RHS system and a dedicated web portal, for its awarding functions. The web portal is managed and hosted by a third party. Both systems can be accessed remotely. Both IT systems are secure and backed-up regularly.
17. RHS has contingency plans in place to ensure business continuity in the event of an emergency or disaster. These include remote working or relocating to its London site. These plans were put into practice this year when the site was inaccessible due to heavy snow.

## **Non-compliance**

1. RHS must ensure that staff and professional associates are adequately informed so that they can fully carry out their roles and responsibilities, specifically with regard to diversity and equality legislation, and all relevant aspects of the QCF.

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

2. RHS must have a documented process for monitoring the work of the senior external verifier.

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

## **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. RHS has an equal opportunities policy that has been reviewed to take account of the requirements of the QCF. Supporting this policy are clear arrangements for reasonable adjustments and special consideration.
2. RHS demonstrate that equality of opportunity is embedded into the organisation, with references in every job description for its professional associates, within qualifications handbooks and in its centre recognition processes.
3. However, there is a lack of specific training or promotion of diversity and equality issues, as mentioned in the previous section of this report. Despite this, RHS does have some good initiatives in this regard and it was evident that equality of opportunity is considered throughout its quality assurance systems and procedures. For example, the RHS independent moderator reports to the QAC on the administration and conduct of the examination processes. This includes consideration of whether due regard was paid to fairness and equity.
4. With regard to qualifications, there are no identified barriers to access to RHS qualifications. RHS has set up an Equality and Diversity Panel whose remit is to review new units and to look at how equality issues are being addressed within the qualifications. This is a new committee and at the time of monitoring has only had one meeting. The panel is made up of the Head of Accreditation and Qualifications, the Principal Examinations Officer, the Quality Assurance Officer and two representatives from approved centres.
5. One of the representatives is also a professional associate whose role includes reviewing units for appropriate, clear language.
6. An outcome of the QCF is an increase in the number of examinations being taken, as these are set for each unit rather than for each qualification. It was good to note that in timetabling for these examinations consideration was given to resources at centres and to the needs of candidates who may be taking the units through a part-time course and who may have to take leave from their usual employment.
7. Another point of good practice, also referred to in the centre recognition section of this report, is that RHS requires centres to have a named contact with responsibility for the management of equality of opportunity within the centre.

RHS has the opportunity to consider how it can best use these named contacts to inform any review of systems and procedures.

8. RHS carries out a variety of consultation activities with professional associates, centres and candidates that inform development. External verifiers will also have the opportunity to speak directly to candidates at their centre visits for the RHS qualifications in practical horticulture.

## **Non-compliance**

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

## **Observations**

1. RHS should consider how best to utilise both the equality and diversity panel and the named contacts within centres in its future promotion of equality and diversity issues.

## 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. Proposals for new qualifications are submitted to the QAC for consideration. In determining the need for new qualifications the QAC makes reference to provision planning tools, including the Sector Qualifications Strategy of the SSC, Lantra, the current demand for existing RHS qualifications and published market data. Based on the advice received from the QAC, the Director of Science and Learning will decide whether or not to continue with the proposed development. When a new qualification is approved for development the RHS business plan is updated to reflect this.
2. In considering the opportunities offered by the QCF, RHS proposed to increase accessibility to its Level 3 qualifications by restructuring them. The proposal was to separate the theory and practical elements of the existing National Qualifications Framework (NQF) qualifications, which were assessed by examination, and develop them into three individual QCF qualifications.
3. The suite of qualifications now consists of three practical qualifications delivered by centres through internal assessment, and four theoretical qualifications that are externally assessed. The benefits are that centres have more choice in deciding which qualification type to offer. There are also benefits for RHS learners, many of whom are mature, part-time students wishing to increase their practical knowledge without having to take examinations.
4. The QAC minutes clearly evidenced discussions relating to the proposals for restructuring as well as those for developing new qualifications. The minutes also recorded detailed discussions in relation to ensuring opportunities for progression between qualifications at different levels.
5. Once the QAC has advised on the need for a particular qualification or suite of qualifications, the Principal Examinations Officer assembles a Qualification Development Team drawn from the pool of professional associates. The Qualification Development Team is responsible for producing a clear rationale for the proposed qualification and associated RoC and units.
6. In developing the rationale for a qualification, the Head of Accreditation and Qualifications will engage in dialogue with Lantra, the SSC for the land-based and environmental industries. There was evidence of extensive correspondence and discussions with Lantra in relation to the proposed qualification development for the QCF. This included a debate about the need to develop

new units focussing on the underpinning theoretical knowledge, which could be delivered as part of a part-time course of study. RHS secured the SSC's agreement to develop these units, despite the fact that some of their content was included in existing units, by presenting a clear and coherent rationale for the proposed provision. This included undertaking a detailed mapping of the proposed units against the national occupational standards. Lantra agreed that some of their practical units could be modified and these are 'shared' units.

7. Before initiating the development of new units, RHS procedures set out a process for interrogating the unit databank in order to determine whether a unit is available for use that meets the requirements of the rationale for the RoC.
8. Where units were identified that could potentially meet the rationale for the RoC, evidence was presented to show that these had been reviewed in detail by the Qualification Development Team to reach a definitive view as to their appropriateness. However, it was noted that where units were determined as unsuitable for inclusion in a given RoC, consideration was not given to their potential inclusion as equivalent units. RHS may wish to review how outcomes of searches of the unit databank are recorded to facilitate the identification of potentially equivalent QCF units at this early stage.
9. Once the need to develop one or more units has been confirmed, the Principal Examinations Officer assembles a Unit Development Team and a Unit Review Team from the pool of professional associates. In this way RHS ensures that unit developers have appropriate expertise in the design and delivery of qualifications as well as sector and subject specialism.
10. The Unit Development Team meets to discuss the different aspects of the content to be covered in the units and suggest appropriate credit values, levels, titles, learning outcomes and assessment criteria. The team is also responsible for identifying and reviewing potentially equivalent QCF units and non-QCF qualifications that might give rise to exemptions.
11. Draft units are submitted to the Unit Review Team for consideration. Members are required to review all aspects of the unit, including the learning outcomes, assessment criteria, level, credit value and title. The team is also asked to consider whether the units are accessible and free from any unnecessary barriers to entry.
12. Evidence of the discussions provided showed that each unit developed was subject to rigorous scrutiny and constructive debate. Experienced practitioners and individuals with expertise in delivering training and assessment were included in the teams to ensure a considered view of the credit value and level of each unit.

13. Responsibility for the final review and sign-off of units rests with the Head of Accreditation and Qualifications. The RHS unit development procedure indicates that the sign off confirms that those involved in the development and review of the unit are suitably qualified and experienced, that the unit development process has been followed and that the unit meets the regulatory requirements of the QCF. The regulators found that this aspect of the procedure was not being implemented in a formalised and systematic way.
14. In practice, units are approved by the Head of Accreditation and Qualifications. They are passed to the Quality Assurance Officer to be allocated an internal reference code and to be formally submitted to the SSC according to the awarding organisation's processes for version control. However, no system was in place to capture and document this approval stage; nor was there a process to enable tracking or reviewing of the progress of development in order to ensure that RHS procedures had been followed.
15. Draft RoC and their constituent units are circulated for consultation and comment from stakeholders. Examples of feedback from heads of horticulture at various land-based colleges and from members of the Institute of Horticulture were also provided to the monitoring team.
16. From the earliest stages of development of RoC consideration is given to identifying non-QCF qualifications likely to lead to an exemption from one or more units in the RoC. Notwithstanding the issue of improving the process for recording potential equivalences referred to in paragraph 8 above, the detailed attention and consideration given to the incorporation of opportunities for exemptions in rules of combination was commendable.
17. As with the unit development, the RHS procedure sets out in detail the procedural steps for the review and sign-off of the quality of the rationale for, and the RoC for, a qualification. However, it was not always clear from the evidence presented whether the review and sign-off had been carried out in accordance with the RHS' own procedures. For example, a complete set of QAC minutes was provided, and a record of all meetings of the qualification and unit development groups was kept, however, it was not immediately clear which meetings and discussions pertained to any given unit or RoC that was under development. RHS needs to ensure that the point at which the quality of a RoC is signed-off is clearly documented for audit purposes
18. RHS has in place a procedure for reviewing its qualifications on an annual basis. The procedure requires several reports to be compiled on the delivery of the previous exam series. This includes reports on the performance of different assessment tools as well as the performance of staff involved in the assessment process. The procedure and processes for producing these reports, for their review by the QAC and subsequent action is well established in



relation to the RHS qualifications currently offered on the NQF. However, given that its QCF qualifications have only been implemented from September 2010 RHS has not yet had the opportunity to test these procedures in relation to its QCF provision. Nevertheless, RHS is confident that due to the modular nature of its current qualifications its existing procedure will continue to be appropriate following the first delivery of its QCF qualifications.

## **Non-compliance**

3. RHS must fully implement its procedure for the final review and signoff of the units that it develops. It needs to ensure that a clear audit trail is in place for each unit or group of units, demonstrating that the development procedure has been followed correctly.

*(Regulatory Arrangements for the Qualifications and Credit Framework (2008), criteria 3.2f)*

4. RHS must fully implement its procedure for the final review and sign-off of its RoC. This needs to ensure that a clear audit trail is in place for each RoC that clearly demonstrates that the development procedure has been followed correctly.

*(Regulatory Arrangements for the Qualifications and Credit Framework (2008), criteria 4.3f)*

## **Observations**

2. RHS should consider recording the outcomes of its initial interrogation and review of available QCF units, in order to support subsequent consideration of potentially 'equivalent' units.

## 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. Traditionally the RHS offered externally set examinations, both paper-based and practical. As described in the previous section, an outcome of the review of qualifications for the QCF, has been that the RHS has also introduced a practical qualification that is assessed internally and is subject to external verification and moderation.
2. RHS has put in place comprehensive arrangements, including detailed specifications and guidance for the delivery of its internally assessed practical qualifications. However, no procedure has been put in place to set out how such arrangements and materials should be produced for future qualifications that may be assessed using this method.
3. RHS has in place a clearly documented procedure for the design, development and quality assurance of written examinations for QCF units. From its pool of professional associates the RHS appoints a senior examiner for the qualifications that it offers at each level of the QCF. Currently it has appointed an additional senior examiner to support the transition from the NQF to the QCF.
4. Senior examiners, together with the appropriate RHS exams officer, assign learning outcomes and associated assessment criteria from the unit(s) to question writers who are tasked with developing questions and mark schemes. Question writers are issued with guidance and training, including a direction to write in accordance with the principles of 'Fair access by design'.
5. Draft questions are reviewed by a moderation panel led by the Senior Examiner; the panel also includes the Internal Moderator for the qualification. Once questions have been moderated the RHS Exams Officer assembles a draft examination paper that covers all the learning outcomes of the unit to be assessed.
6. To ensure examinations are manageable, the RHS has developed a consistent format for questions and examination papers. Each unit will be assessed by a separate examination and should consist of a varying number of parts, with different mark allocations for each part. There are no optional questions. The duration of the examination and the number of questions in the paper is determined by the credit value and level of the unit. The time required to answer each question is also determined by the level of the unit. In this way RHS

ensures that every examination paper enables reliable, consistent and valid judgements to be made about learners' achievement of all the learning outcomes of a unit against its stated assessment criteria.

7. Each draft examination paper is reviewed by an independent examiner commenting on the coverage of content, the wording of the questions, the standard and level of the paper, the mark scheme and time allocation. Feedback is sent to the senior examiner to make any changes required.
8. Finalised papers are proofread by two different proofreaders before the paper is approved for release by the Examinations Officer. This process is evidenced by way of a comprehensive checklist.
9. Some RHS qualifications are graded to the extent that they are awarded at either a 'pass' level or awarded with commendation. For the purpose of its grading arrangements each unit is treated as a separate component; a learner must achieve 70 per cent or more in the examination of each unit in order for the qualification to be awarded with commendation.
10. The Senior Examiner, Internal Moderator and the Independent Moderator annually submit a report to the QAC, covering each examination series, on the development and delivery and award of the examinations for the unit, including a commentary on any moderation activity and applications for reasonable adjustments.

## **Non-compliance**

5. RHS must have in place a procedure for the development of internal assessment methods to ensure that its approach remains consistent for any future qualifications that it may wish to assess in this way.

*(Regulatory Arrangements for the Qualifications and Credit Framework (2008), criteria 5.3)*

## **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.

1. As noted in the previous section, examination papers for the assessment of theory- and knowledge-based units are subject to a rigorously quality assured development procedure. This procedure also includes detailed provision for the secure delivery of examination papers and scripts to ensure the security of the assessment process. This procedure is supported by the RHS Qualifications web portal, which allows examination materials to be tracked during transit.
2. The *Guidance for centres offering RHS qualifications in practical horticulture* sets out detailed procedural and quality requirements for the production, delivery and recording of assessment activities and tasks in approved centres. In particular, RHS provides assessment guides for all the learning outcomes and assessment criteria for each unit of the qualifications. The assessment requirements specify how the learner can demonstrate achievement of the learning outcomes. This guidance is supported by pro-forma assessment documents for assessors and candidates to ensure assessment evidence and outcomes are recorded consistently. The quality of assessment is assured by way of an internal and external verification process.
3. The procedures for the delivery of RHS examinations include provision for ensuring the authenticity of learners by requiring them to produce proof of identity prior to entry to an examination. Invigilators complete an examinations attendance record. In centres approved to offer the RHS qualifications in practical horticulture, assessors are required to take all necessary steps to ensure that their judgements are based on the learner's own work; records of the assessors' decisions and of the learners' written responses must be retained by the centre as evidence of this.
4. Completed examination papers are sent directly from the centre to an allocated examiner for marking. The Senior Examiner holds a standardisation meeting to train examiners on the marking procedure, address any discrepancies in examiners' marking, discuss any clarification or moderation to the mark scheme if required, and to agree a standard to be adopted.
5. Examiners enter the marks awarded for each paper through the RHS Qualifications web portal. Marked examination scripts are subject to an additional mathematical check by RHS staff, and the figures are also checked against the mark entered through the web portal.
6. Prior to the release of examination results, they are subject to a moderation process. Statistical information is produced for each examiner to indicate the

mark distribution for each question marked. A range of marked scripts from each examiner is moderated to ensure compliance with the mark scheme. This information is considered by a moderation panel and any adjustments required will be made by the Senior Examiner. All scripts identified as sitting on a grade boundary (commendation/pass/fail) are re-marked; equally, all scripts of learners who received reasonable adjustments are re-marked. Any adjustments judged necessary are logged and signed-off by the Senior Examiner.

7. RHS maintains a script library, which includes each examination paper it delivers, to allow for comparison of standards from year to year. The consistency of standards is monitored by the Internal Moderators who are party to each stage of the development and delivery process for individual examination papers. They present a report annually to the QAC regarding the maintenance of standards for the assessments delivered at a particular level covering each examination series. Independent Moderators are also contracted by RHS to look at the overall consistency of standards across awards and over time. They also present a report to the QAC annually, covering each examination series. The regulators consider this approach to the standardisation and quality assurance of assessment outcomes to be good practice.
8. Following the delivery of each examination series the Senior Examiner responsible for examination papers compiles a report on each examiner involved in the process in accordance with the procedure for monitoring professional associates. Where examiners do not meet the required standard the Senior Examiner is responsible for arranging additional training or mentoring.
9. For each qualification it offers RHS produces a *Qualification Handbook* that includes a section listing the available exemptions and the process by which they may be claimed. It was noted that the policy on exemptions stipulates that certificated non-QCF achievements must have been passed within the previous 48 months from the date of applying for the exemption. Given that time limits do not apply to the accumulation of the credit requirements for the RoC for its qualifications, this stipulation is not compliant with the QCF design specifications.

## Non-compliance

6. RHS must revise its policy on exemptions to ensure that they are granted in accordance with the RoC for the qualification to be awarded. (*Regulatory Arrangements for the Qualifications and Credit Framework* (2008), criteria 1.24i)

**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. Centres wishing to deliver RHS qualifications must submit a completed application form with any supporting evidence. The application form is reviewed by the quality assurance officer.
2. Once the form and evidence has been accepted, the Quality Assurance Officer allocates a centre approval verifier who will contact the centre directly to arrange a site visit. The visit will then take place within 30 days of allocation, or by mutual agreement.
3. At the inspection, the centre approval verifier completes a separate Centre Assessment Form confirming the centre's suitability to deliver RHS qualifications.
4. The centre approval verifier completes the inspection according to the type of qualification the centre wishes to deliver, looking at facilities, resources and staffing. For example, if the centre wishes to deliver the new QCF RHS qualifications in practical horticulture, it will need to have the staffing to deal with internal assessment and tools and equipment that are sufficient to meet the requirements of the practical assessments. RHS provides *Guidance on Physical Resources and Staff Required to Deliver RHS Qualifications in Practical Horticulture*, to assist centres. This document states the skills and expertise requirements for teachers, assessors and internal verifiers.
5. As part of this process, the centre approval verifier is also required to check that relevant policies and procedures are in place, such as those relating to equal opportunities. However, it is not clear what training or development has been carried out with the centre approval verifiers to ensure their knowledge and competence in relation to this task. This is reported on in the resources and expertise section of this report.
6. The centre recognition forms have been reviewed and updated to meet the requirements of the QCF. For example, centres must have systems in place to deal with the accumulation of credits and credit transfer. However, no specific guidance or training has been provided to centre approval verifiers on these new elements. They will need to understand what it is they are checking for in centres.

7. Once the visit has taken place the centre approval verifier completes a Centre Approval Recommendation Form confirming the outcome of the visit. There are three outcomes available to the verifier – Approved, Withheld subject to Action Plan, and Denied.
8. Once approved, the centre is given access to the RHS web portal and logos and its name is added to the approved centre list. Currently, approval is for a three-year period, however, the centre must complete an update form each year to inform RHS of any changes. This system is adequate for centres where there is no internal assessment.
9. Centres delivering the new RHS qualifications in practical horticulture will be subject to additional monitoring. They will have at least two visits from the external verifiers a year. The external verifiers will be looking at the quality assurance processes that support the assessment and this will also include checks on the centres resources and staffing levels. These centres will be monitored through external verifier reports.
10. External verifiers are required to grade the quality and performance of the centres. The grading criteria range from one to four. Action plans may be required to address deficiencies and serious issues can result in withdrawal of centre recognition. These criteria and other guidance on centre recognition requirements are contained within the *Guidance for Centres Offering RHS Qualifications in Practical Horticulture*.
11. At the time of the monitoring no internal assessment or external verification for the new RHS qualifications in practical horticulture had taken place. While the systems and procedures for centre recognition are in place for these qualifications their effectiveness cannot be tested. RHS is keeping the new system under close scrutiny in its first year. In the future, it may need to consider how the different centre recognition requirements operate together, including the roles of centre verifier and external verifier.

## **Non-compliance**

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

## **Observations**

3. RHS should ensure that training is provided to staff involved in centre approval verification or external verification roles to ensure they have an understanding of all the requirements for centres particularly the new requirements of the QCF.



## **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. RHS has a robust procedure for ensuring accuracy and consistency of standards across its externally assessed qualifications and over time. This procedure is well established and will not need to change substantively for the purpose of assessing QCF units.
2. For the new RHS qualifications in practical horticulture, standards will be assured through external verifier training and standardisation and monitored through external verification reports on centres. It is too soon to test the effectiveness of the internal assessment system as at the time of monitoring no assessments have taken place.
3. The trigger within the RHS systems that indicates if a qualification certificate is required is when the candidate has passed all the units in the relevant RoC. No certificates have been issued for QCF qualifications to date. The draft certificate seen requires amendment to include a statement that indicates the learner has been awarded credits.

### **Non-compliance**

7. RHS must amend the wording on the QCF certificate template to fully meet the design requirements.

*(Regulatory Arrangements for the Qualifications and Credit Framework (2008), criteria 5.13)*

### **Observations**

There are no observations in relation to this section.

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