

Findings of the unit review visits to organisations in the Qualifications and Credit Framework: A summary

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Introduction

In the summer of 2010 the Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation (Ofqual) undertook a desk-based review of the regulatory compliance of 1,950 units in the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF). A paper summarising the findings from the associated report was circulated to stakeholders in September 2010.

To supplement the findings of the desk-based unit review, Ofqual and the Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills (DCELLS) conducted a series of visits to 28 unit-submitting organisations in October and November 2010. This paper provides a summary of the findings and recommendations from the resulting report.

The aims of the visits were to:

- discuss the findings of our desk-based unit review with the unit developers
- establish whether the quality assurance arrangements that unit developers have in place are fit for purpose
- explore other factors that might explain the high incidence of non-compliance identified within the desk-based unit review.

The responses to these visits were very positive and organisations welcomed the opportunity to share their experiences of developing QCF units. The visits provided us with a much better understanding of the reasons behind the findings of the desk-based review, and significant evidence to suggest that the outcomes from units in the QCF have been effectively maintained during the transition from the National Qualifications Framework (NQF).

Key findings

The key findings of the visits are summarised as follows.

- In most cases, unit developers agreed with the detailed comments on the issues that were identified by the unit review in relation to their units.
- Where compliance issues were identified in relation to specific units, we found sufficient evidence to indicate that these issues do not have a direct impact on the learner.
- On the basis of the evidence provided and the discussions held during the visits, we were assured that the unit-submitting organisations have in place, or are further developing, appropriate procedures for the development and quality

assurance of units, and that these procedures are likely to be implemented effectively.

- A hallmark of the implementation of the QCF has been an increasingly collaborative approach to unit development. We received consistent feedback, particularly from awarding organisations, that this approach can often cause frustration, uncertainty, increased development costs and concerns about the quality of collaboratively developed units.
- We came across several examples of good practice where awarding organisations and sector skills councils/bodies (SSC/B) are working together constructively to produce units that can be shared with confidence across different qualifications and awarding organisations.

On the basis of these findings, we made a number of recommendations.

Recommendations

1. An overview of the outcomes of the visits should be communicated to all unit-submitting organisations as soon as possible.
2. A further review of individual units should be undertaken in early 2011, with a focus on units that were submitted to the databank since summer 2010. The objectives of this review should be to:
 - further refine our approach to unit review
 - test our expectation that the quality and compliance of units are improving over time
 - develop colleagues' understanding and experience of the QCF requirements.
3. From an economic perspective, we will consider undertaking an investigation into the potential impact of the cost of collaborative unit development and review on unit submitters, and ultimately, the learner.
4. A review of a number of qualifications in the QCF, planned for early 2011, should include competence-based qualifications that are assessed in the workplace in order to gain a better understanding of the way in which they function in the QCF.
5. Formal arrangements should be put in place to ensure that lessons learned from the implementation of the QCF, in relation to our approach to managing

and coordinating guidance, and communication about planned changes to our regulatory model are captured.

This summary paper addresses recommendation one above, and we have already put in place arrangements to review a further sample of QCF units in March 2011 (recommendation two).

We will be including competence-based qualifications in a desk-based review of a sample of QCF qualifications (recommendation four), also in March 2011.

Findings from the further unit review in March 2011 will be communicated to stakeholders and consideration will be given to providing feedback from the qualification review, if indicated by the findings.

We are currently considering recommendations 3 and 5.

The findings from the report have been reflected in the 2010 Evaluation of the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) regulatory arrangements due to be published in March 2011.

Any questions relating to this summary paper should be addressed to Mike Ricketts, michael.ricketts@ofqual.gov.uk.

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