

2004

The statutory regulation of external qualifications

in England, Wales and Northern
Ireland



Qualifications and
Curriculum Authority



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QUALIFICATIONS
CURRICULUM &
ASSESSMENT AUTHORITY
FOR WALES



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Criteria for the accreditation of external qualifications

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Foreword

QCA, ACCAC and CCEA, the statutory regulatory authorities for external qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, have reviewed their joint regulatory arrangements which have been in place since 1999. The aim is to establish a more effective, flexible and responsive approach to regulating external qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. This publication sets out clear principles for regulation, a revised National Qualifications Framework, and revised criteria.

The principles for regulation clearly establish that the regulatory authorities' main aim is to protect the interests of learners. In particular, regulation will focus on ensuring that learners are guaranteed a fair deal and have sufficient information to make informed choices about the qualifications that best suit their needs.

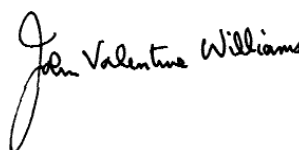
The revised National Qualifications Framework, which comprises nine levels and replaces the existing framework of six levels, will make it easier for learners to find the qualifications they need and to identify the various progression routes to their chosen career.

The revised criteria provide a more transparent basis for awarding bodies to design national qualifications. The regulatory authorities are also introducing revised arrangements for accrediting and monitoring qualifications, which put greater emphasis on awarding bodies' quality assurance arrangements. These arrangements will be underpinned by the criteria in this publication and by statutory codes of practice, which together provide clear quality standards for the effective development and delivery of high quality qualifications. The criteria and codes will be kept under regular review and will be amended as appropriate to reflect future developments.

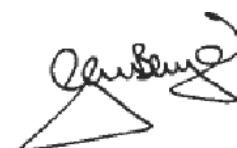
The regulatory authorities are confident that the changes signalled in this document will ensure that the regulatory system is better placed to protect the interests of learners, and that the knowledge, skills and competencies of those learners are recognised and respected internationally.



Ken Boston
Chief Executive,
QCA



John Valentine Williams
Chief Executive,
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Chief Executive,
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Introduction

This document sets out the arrangements for the statutory regulation of external qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. A summary of the statutory provisions is given in Appendix 1.

External qualifications are subject to statutory regulation because the public – learners, employers and other ‘customer’ groups – have a legitimate interest in the continuing availability of high quality qualifications that are fit for purpose, command public confidence and are understood both by those who take them and those who use them. The public also needs to be assured that consistent standards are being properly maintained across awarding bodies over time, that the awarding body offering a qualification is competent, and that if something goes wrong there is a right of appeal.

External qualifications that meet – and continue to meet – the statutory criteria are accredited into the National Qualifications Framework.

The aims of the National Qualifications Framework are to:

- enable learners, providers, employers and users of qualifications to understand the range of qualifications available;
- show how different types of qualifications relate to each other and to promote and support informed choices and progression opportunities;
- help learners of all ages and circumstances to make informed decisions on selecting the qualification(s) that best meet their needs.

The National Qualifications Framework contains all accredited qualifications. Each qualification is given a level, ranging from Entry level through to level 8, and has a title that clearly identifies the awarding body, the nature of the award, and the sector/subject (for further details see Appendix 2). The full list of accredited qualifications can be found on www.openquals.co.uk.

Principles and approaches to statutory regulation

The responsibility for regulating external qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland – and for maintaining the National Qualifications Framework – lies jointly with three ‘regulatory authorities’:

- the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) for England;
- the Qualifications, Curriculum and Assessment Authority for Wales/Awdurdod Cymwysterau, Cwricwlwm ac Asesu Cymru (ACCAC) for Wales;
- the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) for Northern Ireland.

These three regulatory authorities work closely together to safeguard the public interest in the standards of external qualifications and to maintain the integrity of the National Qualifications Framework. To this end, they are committed to meeting the key principles of good regulation:

- the regulatory system must be fit for purpose, transparent and easy to understand;
- intervention must be targeted, consistently applied and proportional to the task in hand;
- the regulatory authorities are seen as accountable to the public, whose interests they seek to safeguard, and to their respective governments.

The regulatory authorities’ approach to statutory regulation consists of:

- developing and publishing criteria for the accreditation of qualifications;
- accrediting qualifications against those criteria;
- keeping under review all aspects of qualifications;
- publishing and disseminating information relating to accredited qualifications.

Developing and publishing criteria for the accreditation of qualifications

The criteria contained in this document set the regulatory standards for external qualifications within the National Qualifications Framework. They underpin all regulated external qualifications. These criteria establish clear quality baselines for the development and delivery of qualifications and the performance of awarding bodies. They have been designed to be rigorous and demanding, and to provide the public with the reassurance they need about external qualifications.

The regulatory authorities will ensure that the criteria are kept under review and that they remain fit for purpose. They will, where appropriate, amend

and/or issue clear guidance on interpreting the criteria to awarding bodies and the users of qualifications.

Accrediting qualifications

Recognising awarding bodies

An awarding body must gain recognised status from the regulatory authorities before it can propose qualifications for accreditation within the National Qualifications Framework.

To achieve recognition, an awarding body must comply with a range of criteria that focus on aspects such as governance, expertise and quality assurance arrangements for developing and delivering qualifications. This recognition process ensures that only those awarding bodies that satisfy the necessary criteria and are deemed capable can submit qualifications for accreditation and subsequent admission into the National Qualifications Framework.

Accrediting qualifications

To be accredited, a qualification must meet all of the relevant criteria set out in this document.

The level of scrutiny that the regulatory authorities apply to awarding bodies' proposed qualifications, or groups of qualifications, at the accreditation stage will depend on the ability of the awarding body to demonstrate consistently the quality of its performance in the following key areas:

- the appropriateness and robustness of the awarding body's processes for developing qualifications;
- the robustness of the awarding body's quality assurance procedures and arrangements

In doing so, the regulatory authorities will consider a number of issues, for example:

- the awarding body's track record in gaining recognition and in the accreditation of its qualifications;
- the awarding body's performance against agreed public performance measures;
- the awarding body's track record in complying with conditions of accreditation;
- the awarding body's track record in respect of the volume of complaints it receives from users of its qualifications and the way in which it deals with those complaints.

More information about the recognition and accreditation process is contained in the *Regulatory authorities' accreditation handbook*.

Keeping under review all aspects of qualifications

Monitoring the performance of awarding bodies

Following the accreditation of a qualification, the regulatory authorities will systematically monitor awarding bodies against the requirements set out in the accreditation criteria. In determining the nature and frequency of the monitoring needed, the regulatory authorities will take full account of the level of risk to the public interest posed by an awarding body and its qualifications.

The regulatory authorities will jointly plan monitoring programmes that focus on quality and probity in the work of awarding bodies. The arrangements will also include cyclic reviews and investigations that focus on consistency and standards in particular subjects or sectors across awarding bodies and over time. Such monitoring will supply the evidence for taking any necessary action. Awarding bodies will be informed of the outcomes of work that has an impact on their activities.

The regulatory authorities publish details of their arrangements for monitoring and reporting in *Arrangements for monitoring and reporting publicly on external qualifications*.

Applying conditions of accreditation

If the regulatory authorities identify that an awarding body is not complying with the relevant criteria, they will make it a ‘condition of accreditation’ that the awarding body rectifies the non-compliance within a specified period of time. These conditions may be applied:

- at the recognition stage;
- at the point of accrediting a qualification;
- as a consequence of regulatory authority monitoring;
- if changes to a qualification become necessary in the interests of users.

Imposing sanctions

The regulatory authorities will impose sanctions where they are needed to encourage awarding bodies’ compliance with the relevant criteria and to protect the interests of users. These sanctions have varying degrees of severity including, ultimately, the withdrawal of accreditation and the removal of the qualification(s) from the National Qualifications Framework. The level of sanction imposed will depend on the nature of an awarding body’s non-compliance, the risks posed to the quality of qualifications and the interests of users.

It is expected that instances requiring the imposition of sanctions will be rare, as awarding bodies will share the regulatory authorities’ aims of making available high quality qualifications and protecting the interests of users.

More information about sanctions can be found in the *Regulatory authorities’ accreditation handbook*.

Ensuring that qualifications meet demand

The regulatory authorities are committed to ensuring that the appropriate range of qualifications is provided and will, therefore, monitor the qualifications market to encourage the development and delivery of high quality qualifications that meet identified local or national needs.

The regulatory authorities will ensure that specialist qualifications that cater for minority interests are protected. However, qualifications that fail to have appropriate take-up after a reasonable period of time will be removed from the National Qualifications Framework.

Providing a safety net for users

If an awarding body is unable to fulfil its commitments to candidates, or withdraws certain qualifications, the regulatory authorities will work with the awarding body and relevant stakeholders to seek to establish alternative arrangements for any existing users affected by the awarding body's action.

Dealing with enquiries and complaints

The regulatory authorities will seek to ensure that enquiries and complaints made to awarding bodies are dealt with in a proper and timely fashion and in accordance with transparent and published procedures.

For GCSE, GCE, VCE, GNVQ and Entry level qualifications, the Examinations Appeals Board (EAB), which is independent of the regulatory authorities, provides a service for appeals, where the normal appeals mechanisms provided by awarding bodies have been exhausted, but where the appellant remains unsatisfied. The regulatory authorities provide advice, where requested, and take action in the light of the EAB's findings, where necessary.

The regulatory authorities may also carry out their own investigations into complaints made about the examination process or the conduct of awarding bodies and, where appropriate, take action.

Publishing and disseminating information relating to accredited qualifications

Helping users make informed choices

The regulatory authorities are committed to providing clear information on the qualifications available within the National Qualifications Framework and the benefits of undertaking such qualifications.

Only high quality qualifications meeting the published criteria are admitted into the National Qualifications Framework. To illustrate this, all certificates relating to qualifications accredited into the National Qualifications Framework carry the logo of one or all of the regulatory authorities – a clear 'quality mark' and a public indication of quality.

Details of all accredited qualifications in the National Qualifications Framework can be found on www.openquals.co.uk. Broad level indicators for

the nine levels in the framework – from Entry level to level 8 – can be found in Appendix 2. These provide an indication of the level of learning and achievement that is certificated at each level in the Framework.

Making public reports and/or statements on the performance of awarding bodies

The regulatory authorities will report publicly, on a regular basis, on the outcomes of their post-accreditation monitoring work and on their more general regulatory functions. The regulatory authorities may also issue a public statement (for example, on the significant failure of an awarding body's quality assurance systems/arrangements) to alert the public and funding agencies to specific risks thereby influencing the behaviour of users and organisations. Such statements are likely to be used by exception and in situations where other regulatory action has not sufficed to rectify a serious problem.

Criteria for awarding bodies' procedures

Plan of provision

An awarding body will only be allowed to submit qualifications for inclusion in the National Qualifications Framework if it has already been recognised by the regulatory authorities as being capable of offering qualifications of the required quality.

Before conferring this recognition, the regulatory authorities need to confirm that the awarding body will be able to meet the relevant quality requirements for the qualifications it intends to offer. The regulatory authorities therefore need to receive the awarding body's plan of provision for qualifications, which identifies the characteristics of the qualifications that the awarding body plans to offer. In addition, the regulatory authorities need to review the awarding body's corporate governance, administration and quality assurance arrangements.

Once an awarding body has received recognition, it must provide the regulatory authorities, on a regular basis, with updated plans of provision that clearly outline broad rationales and intended submission dates for its proposed qualifications.

Should an awarding body wish to extend the range of its provision following its original recognition, it must make an application to the regulatory authorities supported by relevant evidence/information.

The regulatory authorities have a statutory duty to ensure that the National Qualifications Framework includes a sufficient range of qualifications to meet the needs of users, without including an unnecessarily large number of qualifications.

The regulatory authorities seek to discharge this duty by liaising with awarding bodies at two stages:

i) when awarding bodies are deciding on the future provision of their existing qualifications and on what new qualifications to develop;

ii) when awarding bodies come to submit proposals for the first accreditation of new qualifications, extensions to the accreditation of existing qualifications, or the withdrawal of existing accredited qualifications.

Plan of provision

- 1 When applying for recognition to offer qualifications within the National Qualifications Framework, an awarding body must submit a plan of proposed provision defining the level, types and subject/sector of qualifications, and the languages of assessment that it intends to offer.
- 2 Once recognised, the awarding body must forward to the regulatory authorities in confidence, to an agreed timetable, an updated plan of provision that includes details of its intentions to:
 - a) develop new qualifications for accreditation, which follow appropriate sector/subject frameworks;¹
 - b) amend existing accredited qualifications;
 - c) request extensions of accreditation periods;
 - d) withdraw accredited qualifications.
- 3 The awarding body must send, with its updated plans, supporting information outlining the:
 - a) broad justification for each new qualification, amendment to an accredited qualification, request for extension, or withdrawal;
 - b) likely timescales for submissions of full proposals to the regulatory authorities;
 - c) desired dates for the implementation of new or amended qualifications, or for the withdrawal of existing qualifications;
 - d) languages in which the qualifications will be offered.
- 4 Following its original recognition, should an awarding body intend to extend the range of provision defined in its original plan of proposed provision, it must give advance notice to the regulatory authorities and submit further evidence to support the proposed extension.

¹ Sector/subject frameworks have been developed in partnership with relevant organisations. The proposals should indicate the qualification types, levels, and subjects or sectors, coded according to the regulatory authorities' system, where published.

Corporate governance

The regulatory authorities need to review awarding bodies' corporate governance procedures to ensure that they are fit for purpose. This includes confirming the authority of the awarding body representatives who deal with the regulatory authorities, identifying any potential conflicts of interest within the awarding body and ensuring that robust measures are in place to manage these.

It is recognised that awarding bodies carry out functions other than offering and awarding qualifications. It is important that the awarding body is able to demonstrate that the awarding function is not compromised by its other operations.

Corporate governance

- 5 The awarding body's corporate governance arrangements must include:
 - a) robust and transparent governance, organisation and management;
 - b) a single, named point of accountability for maintaining the quality and standards of all qualifications, and for each of the different qualification types;
 - c) a written statement of each organisation's responsibilities, where an awarding body offers qualifications in a partnership or in a consortium with other awarding bodies, including identification of a lead awarding body that will manage quality assurance;
 - d) a clear distinction between the awarding body function and other functions within or across organisations, to manage any potential for conflict of interest or restrictive practices;
 - e) a guarantee and evidence that any franchised or licensed organisation offering its qualifications will comply with the regulatory criteria and the awarding body's submission; such arrangements must be authorised by the regulatory authorities.

- 6 The awarding body must:
 - a) inform the regulatory authorities immediately of any proposed change in:
 - i) ownership or membership of the awarding body;
 - ii) any existing partnership, licensing or franchising arrangements;
 - iii) the corporate or governance structure of the awarding body;
 - iv) the legal identity of the awarding body;
 - b) provide the regulatory authorities with such evidence as they may reasonably require to determine whether any such changed arrangements meet the criteria;
 - c) comply with any subsequent conditions of accreditation imposed by the regulatory authorities;
 - d) make a new submission for recognition as an awarding body if required to do so by the regulatory authorities.

- 7 The awarding body must give the regulatory authorities, in confidence, information and supporting evidence regarding its policy and arrangements for setting fees for accredited qualifications and the authentication of accredited qualifications.

Administration

The regulatory authorities need to be clear that candidates, once registered for an awarding body's qualification, can be secure in the knowledge that the awarding body will protect their interests until certification has been achieved.

Criteria for administration include those that relate to common functions such as the issue of results and dealing with appeals, and those that relate to the awarding bodies' expertise and resources. These criteria will be applied in the context of each awarding body's operations and the qualifications that it offers.

Administration**Resources**

- 8 The awarding body must have and deploy sufficient financial, technical and staffing resources to support the range of qualifications that it intends to offer, for the life of those qualifications.

Equality of opportunity

- 9 Both in setting the structure and content of qualifications, and in its processes and arrangements for assessment and awarding, the awarding body must:
- ensure access and equality of opportunity while safeguarding the integrity of the qualifications;
 - not create unnecessary barriers to achievement;
 - guarantee fair assessment for all candidates, including those with particular assessment requirements;
 - take account of all current legislation in relation to equality of opportunity.

Expertise

- 10 The awarding body must have procedures in place to ensure that its own staff and/or associates are competent in and/or have access to appropriate training and guidance on:
- the design and development of qualifications;
 - assessment and awarding procedures;
 - the subject matter of the qualifications;
 - the language(s) used for assessment;
 - the systems used to ensure consistency of standards across options, centres and time;
 - supporting equality of opportunity.

Centre registration/approval

- 11 The awarding body must have procedures in place for centre registration or centre approval² to ensure that each centre:
- identifies a single named point of accountability for the quality assurance and management of the qualifications;
 - has the resources and systems necessary to support the qualifications;
 - undertakes to use buildings for assessment purposes that provide access for all candidates, in accordance with relevant legislation;
 - undertakes to use staff and/or associates who have the necessary competence in the subject matter of the qualifications, assessment procedures and language(s) used for assessment; and has the systems that ensure consistency of standards and support equality of opportunity;

² This requirement does not apply to educational establishments in respect of qualifications covered by the GCSE, GCSE in vocational subjects, GCE, VCE, GNVQ and AEA code of practice.

- e) documents the respective roles, responsibilities and accountabilities of each partner, with clear lines of communication between the partners, where a centre is a partnership arrangement between organisations;
- f) agrees to provide the awarding body and the regulatory authorities with access to premises, people and records, and to cooperate with the awarding body's monitoring activities.

Data requirements

- 12 The awarding body must collate data about its centres, candidates and qualifications for central monitoring purposes and supply the regulatory authorities with such data on request.³
- 13 The awarding body must ensure that, for each qualification, it (or its centres) retains sufficient evidence of candidates' work or assessment decisions to monitor provision over time.

Reasonable adjustments⁴ and special consideration

- 14 The awarding body must consider the needs of all potential candidates when developing qualifications, associated tasks and assessment, to minimise any later need to make reasonable adjustments for candidates who have particular requirements.
- 15 The awarding body must, when necessary, make reasonable adjustments for candidates with particular requirements to enable them to access fair assessment and demonstrate attainment. The awarding body should not make adjustments that will directly affect performance in the attributes that are the focus of assessment, or otherwise affect the integrity of the award.
- 16 The awarding body must ensure that its reasonable adjustments:
 - a) do not invalidate the assessment requirements set out in the specification for the relevant qualification;
 - b) reflect the current needs of the individual candidates and, as far as is reasonably possible, their usual methods of working;
 - c) do not give the candidates an unfair advantage compared to candidates for whom reasonable adjustments are not being made;
 - d) maintain the relevance, reliability and comparability of the assessment.
- 17 The awarding body must publish to centres its procedures for making reasonable adjustments, including:
 - a) adjustments that need to be determined by the awarding body, indicating how and when applications should be made on behalf of candidates;
 - b) adjustments that give the centre some discretion, together with the associated requirements for decision making and record keeping.

³ The regulatory authorities' data requirements will be published separately.

⁴ The term 'reasonable adjustments' is used in place of the term 'special arrangements', to reflect the terminology in the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, under which the final phase of rights of access comes into force in 2004.

- 18** The awarding body must arrange for ‘special consideration’ to be given to candidates who suffer temporary illness, injury or indisposition at the time of assessment. The awarding body must publish to centres its procedures for accessing special consideration, including:
- a) conditions for eligibility;
 - b) the application procedures.
- 19** The awarding body must ensure that its special considerations:
- a) treat candidates fairly and in accordance with any guidelines from the regulatory authorities particular to the qualification;
 - b) specify the minimum evidence required to make an award, which is an award made to a candidate who is unable, through temporary illness, injury or indisposition, to complete all of the usual assessment requirements.
- 20** The awarding body must have procedures in place to monitor and evaluate the use of reasonable adjustments and special consideration in order to ensure that they are effective and meet the requirements of current legislation. The awarding body must share relevant data with the regulatory authorities on request.

Awards outside England, Wales and Northern Ireland

The regulatory authorities can only accredit and assure the quality of qualifications for use in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. However, awarding bodies may still offer the accredited qualifications in Scotland, UK dependent territories and other countries, and may issue certificates carrying the relevant regulatory authorities’ logo(s).

The regulatory authorities reserve the right to take appropriate action against awarding bodies in cases where practices in their centres outside England, Wales and Northern Ireland could bring the education and training system into disrepute.

Awards outside England, Wales and Northern Ireland

- 21** Certificates for accredited qualifications can be awarded to candidates outside of England, Wales and Northern Ireland and can carry the relevant regulatory authorities’ logo(s) provided that:
- a) the qualifications are offered to the exact specification accredited for use in England, Wales and Northern Ireland;
 - b) the awarding body informs its clients that the regulatory authorities’ logo(s) on the certificate indicate that the qualification is accredited only for England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Issue of certificates

- 22** The awarding body must ensure that:
- a) the design of certificates meets the requirements set out by the regulatory authorities;⁵
 - b) certificates are issued without unnecessary delay;
 - c) there are safeguards against fraudulent or mistaken claims for certificates;
 - d) replacement certificates are labelled as such, and are only issued after steps have been taken to authenticate the claims.

Enquiries and appeals procedures

- 23** The awarding body must have published procedures that centres or candidates can follow to enquire about, or appeal to the awarding body against, assessment or other decisions.

⁵ The regulatory authorities’ requirements for certificate design are shown in Appendix 5.

- 24 The enquiry procedure must provide for centres to seek a check on:
- a) assessment decisions affecting candidates' results;
 - b) other decisions affecting centres and candidates, where appropriate.
- 25 The appeals procedure must:
- a) involve in the decision making at least one independent member, who is not, and has not been at any time during the past seven years, a member of the awarding body's board or committees, or an employee or examiner of the awarding body;
 - b) focus, in the case of appeals against assessment decisions, on whether the awarding body:
 - i) used procedures that were consistent with these regulatory criteria;
 - ii) applied the procedures properly and fairly in arriving at judgements;
 - c) include provision to keep the appellants informed by:
 - i) acknowledging the appeals;
 - ii) indicating the period within which the appeals will be considered;
 - iii) sending written accounts of the outcomes of the appeals;
 - d) avoid deterring appellants on financial grounds by:
 - i) setting reasonable fees;
 - ii) having an equitable system of refunds for individual and group appeals;
 - e) explain how unresolved appeals can be put to independent review.
- 26 Where the outcome of an appeal brings into question the accuracy of other results, the awarding body must take steps to protect the interests of all candidates, the integrity of the qualification and the integrity of the National Qualifications Framework.
- 27 The awarding body must have procedures in place for monitoring, evaluating and reporting annually on the operation of its enquiry services and appeals arrangements, including the number and nature of enquiries and appeals and their outcomes. The awarding body must share relevant data with the regulatory authorities on request.

Dealing with malpractice

- 28 The awarding body must publish procedures to centres for dealing with malpractice on the part of candidates, centre staff, and any others involved in providing the qualification.
- 29 The procedures must require centres to report to the awarding body any suspected malpractice, and must make clear that failure to cooperate can lead to certificates not being issued and future entries and/or registrations not being accepted.
- 30 The awarding body must conduct a full investigation of instances of alleged or suspected malpractice, and must take such action, with respect to the candidates and centres concerned, as is necessary to maintain the integrity of the qualification. The actions taken should be commensurate with the gravity of the malpractice.

- 31** The awarding body must report cases of malpractice to the regulatory authorities whenever it finds evidence that certificates may be invalid. The awarding body must cooperate with any follow-up investigations of malpractice required by the regulatory authorities. The awarding body must agree with the regulatory authorities on appropriate remedial action if there is evidence that certificates may be invalid.

Customer service statements

- 32** The awarding body must publish a customer service statement that specifies:
- a) the quality of service that customers can expect in relation to qualifications;
 - b) relevant points of contact and communication mechanisms;
 - c) its policy on communicating bilingually with centres, where the awarding body offers assessment opportunities through the medium of Welsh or Irish (Gaeilge);
 - d) the fee structure that will apply to the qualification or to authentication of the qualification;
 - e) associated performance measures and feedback arrangements, focusing particularly on manageability and responsiveness.

Monitoring and evaluation

- 33** The awarding body must have procedures in place to monitor its:
- a) compliance with the criteria;
 - b) performance against customer service targets.
- 34** The awarding body's self-monitoring arrangements must provide opportunities for centres and/or candidates and, where appropriate, other users of the qualifications, such as employers, to contribute, and should be used to prompt action to maintain or to improve quality.
- 35** The awarding body must have procedures in place to monitor the work of centres, with the option of taking any or all of the following actions to maintain the integrity of accredited qualifications:
- a) increasing the level of monitoring;
 - b) approving tasks set to candidates, assessment criteria and/or mark schemes;
 - c) placing a moratorium on candidate registrations and on claims for certification;
 - d) suspending or withdrawing approved⁶ centre status.
- 36** The awarding body must have procedures in place to monitor the work of examiners, moderators, independent assessors and external verifiers, with the option of removing their responsibility for assessing and reallocating their work.
- 37** The awarding body must submit self-assessment reports to the regulatory authorities to an agreed timetable, and must allow the regulatory authorities access to premises, meetings, documents and data.

⁶ This requirement does not apply to educational establishments in respect of qualifications covered by the GCSE, GCSE in vocational subjects, GCE, VCE, GNVQ and AEA code of practice.

Use of languages

- 38** The awarding body must use plain language that is free from bias and appropriate to the qualification.
- 39** Apart from foreign language specifications and the other specific instances set out in criteria 40 and 41, the awarding body must provide:
- a) in England, qualification specifications and assessment materials that are expressed in English;
 - b) in Wales, qualification specifications and assessment materials that are expressed in Welsh or English, or in Welsh and English; specifications must state explicitly in which language(s) assessment is available;
 - c) in Northern Ireland, qualification specifications that are expressed in English, and assessment materials that are expressed either in English, or in English and Irish (Gaeilge).
- 40** Awarding bodies may allow assessment in a language other than English, Welsh or Irish (Gaelige) in qualifications designed for the workplace, provided that:
- a) the awarding body ensures that the assessment is comparable to that offered in English, Welsh or Irish (Gaelige);
 - b) lack of proficiency in English, Welsh or Irish (Gaelige) does not prevent the candidate from properly carrying out the role that is supported by the qualification.
- 41** Awarding bodies may allow assessment in British Sign Language in accordance with criteria 14 to 20 in the section *Reasonable Adjustments and Special Consideration*.
- 42** Where more than one language is used, the awarding body must put mechanisms in place to ensure that:
- a) assessments carried out in the different languages are comparable;
 - b) moderation or verification of assessment carried out in the different languages is comparable.

Common criteria for all qualifications

Functions of qualifications

Proposals and rationales

The regulatory authorities have a statutory responsibility for ensuring that the National Qualifications Framework includes a sufficient range of qualifications to meet the needs of users, without including an unnecessarily large number of qualifications.

To achieve this, the regulatory authorities require awarding bodies to provide detailed rationales for the qualifications they submit for accreditation, including information about structure, content and assessment. These rationales must also explain how accreditation of the qualification would not lead to excessive provision within the relevant sector/subject area.

Where, on the basis of the information provided, the regulatory authorities consider that accreditation of the qualification would lead to an excessive number of accredited qualifications within the subject or sector area, or an excessive number of qualifications serving the same or similar functions, accreditation may be refused.

When considering proposals for the withdrawal of existing qualifications, the regulatory authorities need to consider whether the withdrawals and proposed timescales would disadvantage candidates and/or employers.

Proposals and rationales

- 43** When submitting full proposals for accreditation, the awarding body must build on the previous information supplied in its updated plans of provision by setting out the basis on which it considers that each qualification will:
- a) bring additional benefits to users, either by adopting innovative approaches to delivery and/or assessment, or by addressing the needs of an identifiable population not currently catered for within the National Qualifications Framework; submissions must be supported by research and indicate the anticipated numbers of centres and of candidates;
 - b) provide opportunities for progression to further learning and/or further qualifications and/or work or employment;
 - c) have the support of interested parties concerned with:
 - i) education and training, where the qualification is intended to enable progression to educational courses and/or further qualifications;
 - ii) work and employment, where the qualification is intended to provide employment opportunities;
 - iii) regulation and standards, where the qualification is intended to contribute to registration and/or membership requirements;
 - d) be marketed and implemented in ways that will support its sustainability;
 - e) not lead to excessive provision of qualifications in a particular subject or sector;
 - f) not require successful candidates to take up or maintain membership of any organisation, unless so required by statute; this requirement only applies to the award of the accredited qualification and does not preclude a membership requirement for continued use of a designation or to hold a licence to practise.
- 44** When an accredited qualification is to be withdrawn, the awarding body must negotiate with the regulatory authorities a timescale for withdrawal that will allow, where appropriate, alternative arrangements to be made. The awarding body must ensure that adequate notice is given to centres so that the interests of candidates will be protected.

Content of qualifications

Qualification titles

To ensure clarity for all users of the National Qualifications Framework, there has to be consistency in respect of qualification titles.

Qualification titles

- 45** Qualification titles must be set out in the following order: the awarding body, the level of the qualification, the type of qualification, an indication of the content of the qualification, and (in brackets) any endorsement. Further guidance is available from the regulatory authorities.
- 46** The reference to the content of the qualification must be concise. It must refer to an area of learning that is clearly distinct from related areas and is comparable in substance or range to the content of established qualifications at a similar level and of the same type. The reference to content can be supplemented by a bracketed endorsement, which must also be concise, when it is appropriate to indicate a specialist focus.

Structure of qualifications

The regulatory authorities normally require new qualifications to be made up of units, unless the qualifications are very small, in which case they can be thought of as single-unit qualifications. This is because units can be used to:

- reward achievement before the award of the whole qualification;
- demonstrate linkages between different qualifications by including the same units;
- accommodate variation within a qualification by using optional units.

Qualifications should normally allow for the recognition of previous achievements, including:

- recommended prior knowledge and attainment;
- other appropriate previous experience and achievements, including those that have not previously been certificated.

Structure of qualifications

- 47** A qualification must normally be made up of units that can include a core of mandatory units and a range of optional units, except where the qualification is of an established type that has not historically been unitised, such as the GCSE.
- 48** Each of the units must:
- a) have a title that makes it clear that it is a unit and not a whole qualification;
 - b) be assigned a credit value and level according to the guidelines and timetable issued by the regulatory authorities.
- 49** The qualification specification must indicate:
- a) the qualification title, according to the regulatory authorities' criteria;
 - b) any prior knowledge attainment and/or experience recommended for candidates taking the qualification and, where appropriate, arrangements for recognising prior experience and achievement;
 - c) what combination of units or components will be sufficient for the award of the whole qualification and identify any pathways and/or endorsements;
 - d) any combinations of units that will not be acceptable for the award of the whole qualification;
 - e) where the same units are known to feature in other qualifications offered by the same awarding body;
 - f) the National Qualifications Framework level of the qualification.⁷

⁷ The volume of learning, together with the level of the individual units, will determine the overall level of the qualification.

Subject matter of qualifications

It is important that the subject matter:

- relates to the unit and qualification titles, so that candidates and other users can be confident of the meaning of the qualifications;
- is described clearly, so that candidates and other users can understand what is required to qualify;
- contributes, as appropriate, to the development of candidates' more general abilities and helps them to function effectively as individuals and within society.

Subject matter of qualifications

- 50** The subject matter of the units and/or the qualification as a whole must:
- a) support the qualification's purpose;
 - b) specify the knowledge, skills and/or understanding required, giving a clear indication of coverage and depth;
 - c) be expressed in terms of what a successful candidate will have learned or will be able to do;
 - d) refer to relevant National Occupational Standards or to professional standards, if the qualification is employment related or attests to competence in an occupation or profession;
 - e) comply with subject/sector criteria where these exist;
 - f) be accurate and up to date.
- 51** The units and/or the qualification as a whole must include the identification of opportunities, if appropriate to the subject or sector, for developing understanding of:
- a) spiritual, moral, ethical, social, legislative, economic and cultural issues;
 - b) sustainable development, health and safety considerations, and European developments, consistent with international agreements.
- 52** The units and/or the qualification as a whole must include the identification of opportunities, as appropriate to the subject, sector and level, for generating evidence of key skills in application of number, communication, information technology, working with others, improving own learning and problem solving; or at entry level, evidence of relevant skills in these areas, including, as appropriate to the subject, adult literacy and numeracy.

Assessment in qualifications

Design of assessment

It is important that the assessment method(s) chosen for a unit and/or qualification are fit for purpose. They need to:

- match the level that the unit or qualification is intended to represent, so that candidates' assessments will be wholly relevant;
- be within the competence of the awarding body and/or its centres to implement successfully;
- incorporate provision that is external to or independent of the centre, to provide an element of external quality control;
- meet any additional relevant criteria for particular qualification types.

Application of assessment methods

Assessment methods should be applied professionally to ensure that the results provide reliable measures of candidates' achievements. Additional steps should be taken, where necessary, to ensure the comparability of results, regardless of whether candidates attended different centres, were awarded the qualifications by different awarding bodies, or were awarded the qualifications at different times.

Design of assessment

- 53** The assessment for each unit and for the qualification as a whole must include assessment methods that are fit for purpose in that they:
- a) provide a valid measure of the required skills, knowledge, understanding and/or competence;
 - b) provide opportunities for candidates to demonstrate their abilities to meet the full range of requirements;
 - c) differentiate only on the basis of candidates' abilities to meet the requirements;
 - d) are free from any covert or overt discrimination, either in wording or in content;
 - e) are manageable and cost-effective for centres to operate with the minimum disruption and bureaucracy;
 - f) will be undertaken using the minimum equipment and material, as specified by the awarding body in advance of the assessment taking place;
 - g) have options that are comparable in terms of the nature and volume of work required and the level of intellectual demand, if the assessment includes options.
- 54** The assessment for the qualification must include a form of independent assessment or an alternative approved by the regulatory authorities, as appropriate to the qualification type.
- 55** The chosen method or methods of assessment must be appropriate to the qualification type and must comply with any requirements in relevant criteria published by the regulatory authorities, unless otherwise agreed in advance with the regulatory authorities.

Application of assessment methods

- 56** The awarding body must ensure that its systems and procedures produce results that are reliable.
- 57** The awarding body must take steps to ensure that the evidence provided by candidates is:
- a) relevant and authentic;
 - b) sufficient to determine whether the candidates meet the required standards.
- 58** The awarding body must standardise external or independent assessment; where appropriate, its arrangements must include:
- a) setting tasks that meet the specification requirements, are appropriate for the chosen method of assessment and are comparable over time;
 - b) ensuring that the tasks set have associated assessment criteria and/or mark schemes;

- c) ensuring that the assessment criteria/mark schemes are clearly understood by external or independent assessors and that this is reviewed against a sample of candidates' work to identify where adjustments may need to be made;
 - d) ensuring that the tasks, assessment criteria and/or mark schemes are evaluated by appropriately qualified individuals not involved in their development, against the assessment requirements set out in the qualification specification and against tasks set in previous years;
 - e) providing guidance including, where possible, exemplar work, to enable the examiners and/or assessors to meet their responsibilities;
 - f) specifying arrangements to maintain security before, during and after the administration of assessment;
 - g) using the minimum number of examiners and/or independent and external assessors consistent with high quality work, taking account of the number and distribution of candidates and centres, the nature of the assessment requirements and the assessors' experience;
 - h) ensuring that examiners, assessors and/or verifiers do not assess work from any centres in which they have a personal interest or, if this is impossible, arranging for their decisions to be scrutinised;
 - i) ensuring that adequate mechanisms are in place to guarantee the consistency of assessment, including consistency across the languages of English, Welsh and Irish (Gaeilge).
- 59** The awarding body must take steps to ensure that internal assessment is carried out in the same way across centres by providing a full assessment specification, including, where appropriate, assessment criteria, mark schemes, exemplar material, and guidance on the use of witness statements.
- 60** The awarding body must have arrangements in place to enable internal assessors to meet their responsibilities. These arrangements must include, where appropriate, providing assessors with information on:
- a) how to ensure that any tasks set are consistent with the specification;
 - b) the nature and type of acceptable evidence;
 - c) the extent to which candidates can be allowed to redraft work before it is assessed;
 - d) the limits on the assistance that can be given to candidates with work that is to be assessed;
 - e) how to ensure that assessment requirements can be interpreted consistently;
 - f) the minimum data that centres should keep to track candidates' progress;
 - g) how the centre should confirm to the awarding body that the assessment evidence produced by candidates is authentic;
 - h) its requirements for ensuring that alternative assessments devised by the centre, which will require the awarding body's written permission, are equivalent to the standard arrangements.

- 61** The awarding body must ensure that internal assessment is moderated or verified. Its arrangements must, where appropriate, include:
- a) specifying the records and materials that centres should retain for moderation/verification purposes, including records of questions and responses from oral questioning;
 - b) providing guidance for centres to carry out internal moderation/verification;
 - c) arranging for external or independent moderation/verification using the minimum number of external moderators/verifiers consistent with high quality work, and taking account of the number and distribution of candidates and centres, the nature of the assessment requirements, and the moderators'/verifiers' experience;
 - d) providing guidance to enable the external moderators/verifiers to meet their responsibilities, including guidance on:
 - i) the size and nature of initial samples for moderation/verification;
 - ii) how to ensure sufficient evidence for secure decisions, based on samples that include the full range of attainment in a centre, all of the assessors and any different types of assessment;
 - iii) additional sampling, if the initial samples indicate that the required standards are not being applied.
 - e) ensuring that the external moderators/verifiers do not review work from any centres in which they have a personal interest or, if this is impossible, arranging for their decisions to be scrutinised;
 - f) checking the work of each external moderator/verifier for accuracy and consistency, compiling reports on each of them, and taking remedial action in cases judged to be unsatisfactory;
 - g) ensuring that all relevant work is reassessed, where external moderation/verification determines that internal assessment decisions are inconsistent;
 - h) providing feedback to centres on the accuracy and consistency of their assessment decisions and, as appropriate, on their internal quality assurance identifying any required actions.
- 62** Where relevant, the awarding body must ensure that adequate mechanisms are in place to guarantee the consistency of moderation/verification decisions across the languages of English, Welsh and Irish (Gaeilge).

Determination and reporting of results

Result determination, aggregation and grading

Result determination refers to the processes by which awarding bodies use the information from assessments to determine individual candidates' results. The regulatory authorities need to ensure that these processes are sufficiently robust for candidates and other users to be able to interpret results with confidence.

Aggregation is the combination of results from different assessments to arrive at overall results for candidates. Use of aggregation differs between qualification types. Some qualifications aggregate results to arrive at overall grades, which can serve as measures of the candidates' overall success. Other qualifications give separate reports of results in different units, to show the candidates' individual areas of competence which can be more relevant in employment settings. The regulatory authorities need to ensure that aggregation practices are consistent, so that qualifications of the same types within the National Qualifications Framework can be compared.

Results may be issued as grades. This is useful if comparisons are made of candidates' achievement, for example for entry to higher education. The regulatory authorities need to ensure that grading practices are consistent, so that qualifications of the same types within the National Qualifications Framework can be compared.

Result determination, aggregation and grading

- 63** The awarding body must ensure, as applicable, that:
- it determines how pass marks and/or grade boundaries and/or competence are established;
 - results are determined on the basis of sufficient evidence;
 - comprehensive records are maintained of the decisions taken and of the standards achieved;
 - standards are comparable from year to year, across centres and across qualifications with the same titles;
 - decisions are reviewed and results adjusted in cases where errors are identified;
 - the bases on which decisions are made are open to monitoring by the regulatory authorities;
 - the administration of the awarding process provides the technical and professional support that awarders need to secure accurate judgements.
- 64** The awarding body must make sure that assessments are accurate and consistent, recognising that there may be occasions when decisions made by assessors or examiners need to be changed. Changes to the outcomes of assessments may be made at any appropriate stage before or after overall results have been determined.
- 65** Arrangements for aggregation, if applicable, and for reporting must:
- clearly state the form in which the qualification and/or unit results will be reported;
 - clearly state, where required, how different assessment results will be aggregated to arrive at overall results or grades.
- 66** The awarding body must provide information to centres on how the overall award will be derived from candidate performance.
- 67** If the results of a qualification are to be graded, then the awarding body must provide information that will enable users to differentiate between the meanings of grades.

Additional criteria for different types of qualification

Entry level qualifications

Content of Entry level qualifications

- 68 Entry level qualifications must:
- a) be designed to facilitate learning in practical situations that motivate candidates and that are relevant to adult life;
 - b) enable attainment to be reported at one or more of the sub-levels: Entry 1, Entry 2 or Entry 3, where Entry 3 is the highest outcome;
 - c) align Entry 1, Entry 2 and/or Entry 3 with the standards⁸ specified by the regulatory authorities;
 - d) be consistent with statutory requirements as follows:
 - i) for national curriculum subjects, with the relevant statutory programmes of study for the subjects;
 - ii) for religious education and religious studies, with the statutory requirements appropriate to the age of the candidates;
 - e) provide a basis of progression to other relevant qualifications:
 - i) for literacy, numeracy and information technology, to corresponding key skills, GCSEs and other relevant qualifications;
 - ii) for national curriculum subjects, religious education and religious studies, to corresponding GCSEs and other relevant qualifications;
 - iii) for other areas of learning, to relevant qualifications at and beyond level 1 of the National Qualifications Framework.

Assessment in Entry level qualifications

- 69 Assessment arrangements for Entry level qualifications must:
- a) ensure that the methods proposed for each of the sub-levels, Entry 1, Entry 2 and Entry 3, enable candidates to demonstrate their achievement, which may require a range of assessment methods;
 - b) involve practical and/or oral and/or written work as appropriate to the area of learning;
 - c) be capable of use in a range of settings;
 - d) require the candidates to generate evidence of working independently, allowing for reasonable adjustments as set out in criteria 14-20;
 - e) include tasks that are externally set or validated, externally marked or moderated, and conducted under supervised and specified conditions;
 - f) require that such tasks contribute at least:
 - i) 50 per cent to the overall award in the case of national curriculum subjects, literacy, numeracy and information technology;
 - ii) 40 per cent to the overall award in other cases;

⁸ The standards are lower than those required for awards at level 1 of the National Qualifications Framework and are broadly in line with achievements at national curriculum levels 1, 2 and 3 or their equivalents in other areas of learning.

- g) require that any end-of-unit or terminal assessment, whether externally or internally set, is conducted under supervised and specified conditions;
- h) specify arrangements for re-tests.

Reporting of Entry level qualifications

- 70 Attainment must be reported at one or more of Entry 1, Entry 2 or Entry 3, where Entry 3 is the highest outcome.

Adult literacy and numeracy qualifications⁹

Content of adult literacy and numeracy qualifications

- 71 For adult literacy and numeracy qualifications, the subject matter must meet the requirements of the relevant national standards in adult literacy or adult numeracy at the appropriate levels.

Assessment in adult literacy and numeracy qualifications

- 72 For adult literacy and numeracy qualifications, the assessment model is specified by the regulatory authorities.
- 73 At Entry level, the assessment model must comply with the additional specific criteria for Entry level qualifications.
- 74 At levels 1 and 2, the method of assessment is by means of the external tests developed for adult literacy/key skills communication and adult numeracy/key skills application of number, unless otherwise agreed by the regulatory authorities.

Reporting of adult literacy and numeracy qualifications

- 75 For adult literacy and numeracy, there must be arrangements to report:
- a) at Entry level for literacy, separate levels of achievement for speaking and listening, for reading, and for writing, so as to form a profile;
 - b) at Entry level for numeracy, the overall sub-level achieved (ie Entry 1, Entry 2, or Entry 3);
 - c) at levels 1 and 2, feedback to unsuccessful candidates on performance related to the national standards.

English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) qualifications

Content of ESOL Skills for Life qualifications, Entry level, levels 1 and 2

- 76 Qualifications at Entry level and at levels 1 and 2, that meet the requirements of the national standards for adult literacy and demonstrate a clear relationship to the adult ESOL core curriculum, must be titled ESOL Skills for Life.

⁹ Adult literacy and numeracy qualifications in Northern Ireland are called 'essential skills'.

Key skills qualifications

Content of key skills qualifications

- 77** Qualifications that use the following terms in their titles must be based on the specifications developed by the regulatory authorities: ‘key skills’, ‘key skills qualifications’, ‘application of number’, ‘communication’, ‘information technology’, ‘improving own learning and performance’, ‘problem solving’, or ‘working with others’.

Assessment in key skills qualifications

- 78** Qualifications in key skills must use the assessment model specified by the regulatory authorities.
- 79** If the assessment method includes tests, awarding bodies must use the agreed national tests and allow candidates to take the tests as many times as they want. If the tests do not have pre-set pass marks, the awarding bodies must agree the pass marks at meetings that include all of the awarding bodies involved in the relevant assessment series.
- 80** Awarding bodies must:
- a) participate in cross-awarding body moderation activities for internal assessment;
 - b) carry out random checks, after the final date of completion, for centres where nearly completed portfolios were included in the moderation process.

General Certificates of Secondary Education (GCSEs)

Content of GCSEs

- 81** The titles of GCSEs must:
- a) correspond to the titles used in the relevant subject criteria published by the regulatory authorities, where such criteria exist;
 - b) be sufficiently broad to cover different specifications in the same subject area, where relevant subject criteria are not published by the regulatory authorities;
 - c) use the words ‘GCSE (short course)’, if based on a short-course specification;
 - d) use the words ‘GCSE (double award)’, if equivalent to two separate GCSEs.
- 82** The subject matter of GCSEs must:
- a) meet the GCSE subject criteria published by the regulatory authorities for the subject title, where they exist;
 - b) compare in substance and range to the GCSE subject criteria published by the regulatory authorities for other subjects, where relevant subject criteria do not exist;

- c) be consistent with the statutory programmes of study within the national curriculum where they exist;
- d) state which aspects/options must be taken by candidates to meet the requirements of their respective countries, where statutory requirements differ in England, Wales and Northern Ireland;
- e) for short-course specifications, include half of the content of a single award GCSE and cover the full range of grades;
- f) for double award specifications, demand a range of knowledge, understanding and other abilities equivalent to two separate GCSEs;
- g) for double award specifications in applied subjects, normally comprise three equally sized and equally weighted units;
- h) identify opportunities for the assessment of the nationally specified wider key skills of improving own learning and performance, problem solving, and working with others, cross-referencing those opportunities with the criteria in part B of the key skills specifications where appropriate;
- i) require candidates to make effective use of ICT as appropriate to the subject and provide, where appropriate, assessment opportunities for ICT.

Assessment in GCSEs

83 The assessment arrangements for GCSEs must:

- a) set out the relationship between the assessment objectives and the assessment components;
- b) show the proportion of marks allocated to each assessment objective (or group of assessment objectives) and to each assessment component;
- c) include question papers targeted at two tiers of grades, A*–D and C–G, unless subject criteria or the regulatory authorities indicate otherwise;
- d) where candidates are required to produce extended written material in English, Welsh or Irish (Gaelige), require that candidates:
 - i) ensure that text is legible and that spelling, punctuation and grammar are accurate so that meaning is clear;
 - ii) present information in a form that suits its purpose;
 - iii) use a suitable structure and style of writing;
- e) comply with subject criteria relating to the balance between external and internal assessment, where such criteria exist;
- f) for double award GCSEs in applied subjects, require one third external assessment;
- g) where subject criteria are not published, be agreed individually with the regulatory authorities as to the balance between external and internal assessment and to the contribution made by external assessment to the terminal examination;
- h) allow only one retake of assessment units with staged assessments with the better result counting towards the qualification;
- i) ensure results for a unit have a shelf-life limited only by the shelf-life of the relevant specification.

Reporting of GCSEs

- 84** There must be arrangements for grading and reporting of GCSEs so that:
- a) attainment that is sufficient to lead to the award of a certificate is reported on an eight-grade scale from A* to G, where A* is the highest;
 - b) attainment that is insufficient to lead to the award of a certificate is reported as Unclassified or U;
 - c) the grades awarded match the grade descriptions in relevant subject criteria published by the regulatory authorities, where these exist;
 - d) the grades awarded match descriptions for grades A, C and F submitted by the awarding body and approved by the regulatory authorities, in those subjects for which the regulatory authorities have not published subject criteria;
 - e) the grade for double award GCSEs is reported in the format AA, BB, CC, DD, EE, FF, GG;
 - f) the grade/s on short-course and double award GCSE certificates are accompanied by explanatory notes on the nature of these types of GCSE.

General Certificates of Education (GCEs)

Content of GCEs

- 85** The titles of GCEs must:
- a) correspond to the titles used in the relevant subject criteria published by the regulatory authorities, where such criteria exist;
 - b) be sufficiently broad to cover different specifications in the same subject area, if relevant subject criteria are not published by the regulatory authorities.
- 86** The subject matter of GCEs must:
- a) meet the GCE subject criteria published by the regulatory authorities for the subject title, where they exist;
 - b) compare in substance and range to the GCE subject criteria published by the regulatory authorities for other subjects, if relevant subject criteria do not exist;
 - c) for AS qualifications:
 - i) provide an appropriate balance of knowledge, skills and understanding to match the first half of a full A level course of study;
 - ii) enable candidates to be assessed normally, by means of three assessment units, which, taken together, will have a total weight of 50 per cent of the A level;
 - iii) include assessment units that will normally be weighted within the range of 15–20 per cent of the full A level. For applied subjects, assessment units should normally be equally sized and equally weighted;

- iv) for double award specifications, enable candidates to be assessed normally by means of six assessment units, which, taken together, will have a total weight of 50 per cent of the A level double award;
- d) for A2 assessments that will be combined with AS assessments to lead to the award of a full A level:
 - i) provide an appropriate balance of knowledge, skills and understanding to match the second half of a full A level course of study;
 - ii) normally enable candidates to be assessed, by means of three assessment units, which, taken together, will have a total weight of 50 per cent of the A level;
 - iii) include assessment units that will normally be weighted within the range of 15–20 per cent of the full A level. For applied subjects, assessment units should normally be equally sized and equally weighted;
 - iv) for double award specifications, normally enable candidates to be assessed, by means of six assessment units, which, taken together, will have a total weight of 50 per cent of the A level double award;
- e) include optional units, if these:
 - i) demand additional skills, knowledge and/or understanding;
 - ii) extend the core content within a specialist context and/or introduce links to another subject area;
- f) identify opportunities to generate evidence for the assessment of the nationally specified wider key skills of improving own learning and performance, problem solving, and working with others.

Assessment in GCEs

- 87** The assessment arrangements in GCEs must:
- a) offer candidates the opportunity to be assessed either (in stages) during the course or at the end of the course;
 - b) include an explanation of the relationship between the assessment objectives and the assessment units;
 - c) show the proportion of marks allocated to each assessment objective (or group of assessment objectives) and to each assessment unit;
 - d) show which assessment objectives will include the assessment of written communication;
 - e) include synoptic assessment at A2, to test the candidates' understanding of the connections between the different elements of the subject;
 - f) be comparable for all candidates, even where there are optional assessment units or optional examination questions;
 - g) where candidates are required to produce written material in English, Welsh and Irish (Gaelige), require that candidates:
 - i) ensure that text is legible and that spelling, punctuation and grammar are accurate so that meaning is clear;
 - ii) select and use a form and style of writing appropriate to purpose and to complex subject matter;
 - iii) organise information clearly and coherently, using specialist vocabulary when appropriate;

- h) comply with subject criteria relating to the balance between external and internal assessment, including synoptic assessment where such criteria exist;
- i) where subject criteria are not published, be agreed individually with the regulatory authorities, as to the balance between external and internal assessment, including synoptic assessment;
- j) allow resits of an assessment unit with the best result counting towards the qualification;
- k) stipulate that results for a unit have a shelf-life limited only by the shelf-life of the relevant specification.

Reporting of GCEs

- 88 The qualification must specify arrangements for grading and reporting of GCEs so that:
 - a) attainment that is sufficient to lead to the award of a certificate is reported on a five-grade scale from A to E, where A is the highest;
 - b) attainment that is insufficient to lead to the award of a certificate is reported as Unclassified or U;
 - c) the grades awarded match performance descriptions published by the regulatory authorities, if available;
 - d) if relevant performance descriptions published by the regulatory authorities are not available, the grades awarded match performance descriptions for AS and A2 levels at the grade boundaries A/B and E/U submitted by the awarding body and approved by the regulatory authorities.
- 89 AS double award and A level double award are reported on the following grading scale: AA, AB, BB, BC, CC, CD, DD, DE, EE, EU.

Advanced Extension Awards (AEAs)

Content of AEAs

- 90 AEAs must be accessible to any candidate who has studied any awarding body's corresponding GCE specification, without their having to undertake extra study or learning.
- 91 AEAs must normally be based on the Advanced GCE subject criteria, where they exist, and not on individual specifications. AEAs must be designed to be more demanding than the corresponding A level by requiring a greater depth of understanding and by requiring, in particular, the use of the skills of critical analysis, evaluation and synthesis.

Assessment in AEAs

- 92 The assessment arrangements for AEAs must comprise 100 per cent external assessment, unless another arrangement is agreed with the regulatory authorities.

Reporting of AEAs

- 93 There must be arrangements for grading of AEAs so that:
- a) attainment that is sufficient to lead to the award of a certificate is reported on a two-grade scale comprising Distinction and Merit, where Distinction is the higher;
 - b) attainment that is insufficient to lead to the award of a certificate is reported as Unclassified or U;
 - c) the grades awarded match the performance level descriptions in the relevant regulatory authorities' test specifications.

National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs)**Content of NVQs**

- 94 NVQs must consist of the relevant units taken from the National Occupational Standards developed by the appropriate Sector Skills Council or sector body and approved by the UK Coordinating Group on behalf of the National Occupational Standards Board.
- 95 The structure of an NVQ must be made up of relevant units of National Occupational Standards which have been mapped to the relevant key skills. There must be an indication of whether discrete key skills units will form part of the qualification.

Assessment in NVQs

- 96 Assessment in NVQs must implement the assessment strategies specified by the appropriate Sector Skills Council or sector body and approved by the regulatory authorities.
- 97 The specified assessment strategies must enable the qualification to attest to competence in the workplace by incorporating the following requirements:
- a) application of the specified skills, knowledge and understanding to the standards required in the workplace;
 - b) specification of the type and amount of evidence to be collected for assessment purposes;
 - c) identification of any aspects of the National Occupational Standards that must be assessed through performance in the workplace;
 - d) clarification of the extent to which simulated working conditions may be used in assessment, and of any required characteristics of the simulations, including definitions of what might constitute realistic working environments;
 - e) specification of the occupational expertise of assessors, internal verifiers and external verifiers.
- 98 Awarding bodies must maintain a register of all their external verifiers and provide such information to the regulatory authorities on request.

- 99 For assessment in Welsh, awarding bodies must take account of the guidance material produced by Awdurdod Cymwysterau, Cwricwlwm ac Asesu Cymru/the Qualifications, Curriculum and Assessment Authority for Wales (ACCAC).

Reporting of NVQs

- 100 An awarding body must put in place arrangements for reporting that allow for the recognition of NVQ units awarded by other awarding bodies, where the units form part of the NVQs.

Qualifications at level 4 and above¹⁰

Content of qualifications at level 4 and above

- 101 Qualifications must promote the development or enhancement of general higher level skills and abilities. Individual qualifications must identify how relevant skills and abilities are developed alongside sector/occupationally-specific skills and understanding, and how these skills and abilities are reflected in the assessment of the unit or qualification.
- 102 All qualifications must include a significant mandatory component, which will normally take the form of a core of units at the same level as that of the whole qualification, which apply to all awards with the same title. The extent of the mandatory proportion of the qualification will vary, but will normally be at least 40 per cent.

Assessment in qualifications at level 4 and above

- 103 The assessment scheme for a full qualification must identify how candidates can integrate knowledge, skills and, where appropriate, competence across units. Assessment should encourage candidates to apply and reflect on their studies, both within and across units and produce evidence to demonstrate ability across a range of units.

¹⁰ Other than NVQs.

Appendix 1

The statutory provisions

- 1 Responsibilities for regulating external qualifications lie with three regulatory authorities.
 - In England, the regulatory authority is the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA), which regulates all external qualifications.¹¹ QCA and ACCAC work with the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) to ensure that National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) and Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQs) remain aligned.
 - In Wales, the regulatory authority is Awdurdod Cymwysterau, Cwricwlwm ac Asesu Cymru/the Qualifications Curriculum and Assessment Authority for Wales (ACCAC), which regulates all external qualifications except for the formal accreditation of individual NVQs which is the sole responsibility of QCA.¹²
 - In Northern Ireland, the regulatory authority is the Council for Curriculum Examinations and Assessment (CCEA), which regulates external qualifications other than NVQs which are the responsibility of QCA.¹³

Where this guide refers to 'the regulatory authorities', the term includes ACCAC, CCEA and QCA (as appropriate). Reference to the regulatory authorities in the section dealing with National Occupational Standards includes, in addition, the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA).

- 2 For the purposes of statutory regulation¹⁴, an 'external qualification' is a qualification:
 - which is academic or vocational in nature (including a National Vocational Qualification), but not an academic qualification at first degree level or any comparable or higher level; and
 - which is authenticated or awarded by an outside body (that is, a body or person other than the institution or employer that provides the course of education or training leading to the qualifications).

Thus, the statutory regulation arrangements do not extend to:

- academic qualifications at first degree level or any comparable or higher level;
- qualifications that are not authenticated or awarded by an outside body (as defined above);

11 Section 24 of the Education Act 1997, as amended by the Learning and Skills Act 2000 and the Education Act 2002.

12 Section 30 of the Education Act 1997, as amended by the Education (Qualifications, Curriculum and Assessment Authority for Wales) (Conferment of Functions) Orders 1997 and 2001, and amended by the Learning and Skills Act 2000 and the Education Act 2002.

13 The Education (Northern Ireland) Order 1998.

14 Section 24(6) and (7) of the Education Act 1997.

- courses of education or training which do not lead to a formal external qualification (for example, pre-entry level courses).
- 3 The regulatory authorities' functions in respect of external qualifications are:
- developing and publishing criteria for the accreditation of qualifications;
 - accrediting qualifications;
 - keeping under review all aspects of qualifications;
 - publishing and disseminating information relating to accredited qualifications.
- 4 These functions are distinct from the regulatory authorities' responsibilities to advise the respective Ministers on the exercise of their powers to determine, for example, which courses of study leading to an external qualification may be provided for pupils of compulsory school age by or on behalf of a maintained school or funded for learners post-16 and post-19.

Appendix 2

A guide to National Qualifications Framework levels

The National Qualifications Framework enables learners to make well-informed judgements on the qualifications they need and to identify clear progression routes to their chosen career, promoting access, motivation and achievement in education and training.

Proposed National Qualifications Framework level indicators

Level indicators provide a guide to the range of qualifications and levels in the National Qualifications Framework and give an overview of the learning and achievement that is recognised by qualifications at each of the nine levels.

The indicators provide:

- guidance on the level of knowledge and skills which are recognised at each level;
- guidance on how the knowledge and skills gained can relate to job roles;
- examples of the qualifications which are available at each level.

The indicators are not intended to be precise or comprehensive statements. They have been developed as a working guide and will be kept under review.

Key users

The level indicators have been designed for the following key users:

- individual learners;
- parents;
- teachers/tutors/trainers;
- careers advisors;
- employers.

Lifelong Learning

The National Qualifications Framework is relevant at all stages of learning. Lifelong learning takes place in many kinds of formal and informal settings. Qualifications can be used to recognise this learning and the main places where qualification-based learning can be accessed include schools, colleges, adult learning centres, training providers, universities, in the workplace, and through distance learning. Further information on qualifications awarded by higher education institutions is available from the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) at www.qaa.ac.uk.

Proposed National Qualifications Framework level indicators

<i>Framework level</i>	<i>Level indicators</i>	<i>Examples of qualifications</i>
Entry	Entry level qualifications recognise basic knowledge and skills and the ability to apply learning in everyday situations under direct guidance or supervision. Learning at this level involves building basic knowledge and skills and is not geared towards specific occupations.	Qualifications are offered at Entry 1, Entry 2 and Entry 3, in a range of subjects
Level 1	Level 1 qualifications recognise basic knowledge and skills and the ability to apply learning with guidance or supervision. Learning at this level is about activities which mostly relate to everyday situations and may be linked to job competence.	NVQ 1; Certificate in Plastering; GCSEs Grades D–G; Certificate in Motor Vehicle Studies.
Level 2	Level 2 qualifications recognise the ability to gain a good knowledge and understanding of a subject area of work or study, and to perform varied tasks with some guidance or supervision. Learning at this level involves building knowledge and/or skills in relation to an area of work or a subject area and is appropriate for many job roles.	NVQ 2; GCSEs Grades A*–C; Certificate in Coaching Football; Diploma for Beauty Specialists.
Level 3	Level 3 qualifications recognise the ability to gain, and where relevant apply a range of knowledge, skills and understanding. Learning at this level involves obtaining detailed knowledge and skills. It is appropriate for people wishing to go to university, people working independently, or in some areas supervising and training others in their field of work.	Certificate for Teaching Assistants; NVQ 3; A-levels; Advanced Extension Awards; Certificate in Small Animal Care.
Level 4	Level 4 qualifications recognise specialist learning and involve detailed analysis of a high level of information and knowledge in an area of work or study. Learning at this level is appropriate for people working in technical and professional jobs, and/or managing and developing others. Level 4 qualifications are at a level equivalent to Certificates of Higher Education.	Diploma in Sport & Recreation; Certificate in Site Management; Certificate in Early Years Practice.
Level 5	Level 5 qualifications recognise the ability to increase the depth of knowledge and understanding of an area of work or study to enable the formulation of solutions and responses to complex problems and situations. Learning at this level involves the demonstration of high levels of knowledge, a high level of work expertise in job roles and competence in managing and training others. Qualifications at this level are appropriate for people working as higher grade technicians, professionals or managers. Level 5 qualifications are at a level equivalent to intermediate Higher Education qualifications such as Diplomas of Higher Education, Foundation and other degrees that do not typically provide access to postgraduate programmes.	Diploma in Construction; Certificate in Performing Arts.

<i>Framework level</i>	<i>Level indicators</i>	<i>Examples of qualifications</i>
Level 6	Level 6 qualifications recognise a specialist high level knowledge of an area of work or study to enable the use of an individual's own ideas and research in response to complex problems and situations. Learning at this level involves the achievement of a high level of professional knowledge and is appropriate for people working as knowledge-based professionals or in professional management positions. Level 6 qualifications are at a level equivalent to Bachelors degrees with honours, graduate certificates and graduate diplomas.	Certificate or Diploma in Management
Level 7	Level 7 qualifications recognise highly developed and complex levels of knowledge which enable the development of in-depth and original responses to complicated and unpredictable problems and situations. Learning at this level involves the demonstration of high level specialist professional knowledge and is appropriate for senior professionals and managers. Level 7 qualifications are at a level equivalent to Masters degrees, postgraduate certificates and postgraduate diplomas.	Diploma in Translation; Fellowship in Music Literacy.
Level 8	Level 8 qualifications recognise leading experts or practitioners in a particular field. Learning at this level involves the development of new and creative approaches that extend or redefine existing knowledge or professional practice.	Specialist awards

* Please note that currently titles such as 'Certificate' and 'Diploma' are not indicators of the level of a qualification.

Appendix 3

List of codes of practice

The regulatory criteria for the accreditation of qualifications need to be used in conjunction with the following codes of practice. These codes build on the criteria to ensure quality, consistency, accuracy and fairness in the assessment and awarding of the different types of qualifications.

- The GCSE, GCSE in vocational subjects, GCE, VCE, GNVQ and AEA code of practice
- The NVQ code of practice

Appendix 4

List of subject-specific criteria

The regulatory authorities prepare title-specific criteria specifying the characteristics essential for a qualification to be accredited under a particular title (denoting subject, sector or skill area). The criteria, which are published separately, cover the areas set out below. They are currently available on the regulatory authorities' websites. Qualifications must refer to relevant National Occupational Standards if the qualification is employment related or attests to competence in an occupation. Details of occupational sectors for which National Occupational Standards exist are available from the appropriate Sector Skills Council or sector body. Further information is included in Appendix 6

www.qca.org.uk
www.accac.org.uk
www.ccea.org.uk

<i>GCSE level subjects with subject criteria</i>	
Art and Design	Applied Information and Communication Technology
Applied Art and Design	Leisure and Tourism
Business Studies and Economics	Manufacturing
Applied Business	Mathematics
Classical Subjects	Modern Foreign Languages
Design and Technology	Music
Engineering	Physical Education
English	Religious Studies
English Literature	Science
Gaeilge	Applied Science
Geography	Social Sciences
Health and Social Care	Welsh
History	Welsh Second Language
Home Economics	Welsh Literature
Information and Communication Technology	

<i>GCE AS/A level subjects with subject criteria</i>	
Art	History
Applied Art and Design (2005)	Hospitality and Catering (2005*)
Biology	Applied Information and Communication Technology (2005)
Business Studies	Latin and Classical Greek
Applied Business (2005)	Law
Chemistry	Leisure Studies (2005)
Classical Civilisation	Manufacturing (2005*)
Computing	Mathematics
Construction and the Built Environment (2005*)	Media: Communication and Production (2005)
Critical Thinking	Modern Foreign Languages
Design and Technology	Music
Economics	Performing Arts (2005)
English Language	Physical Education
English Language and Literature	Physics
English Literature	Psychology
Engineering (first teaching 2005)	Religious Studies
General Studies	Travel and Tourism (2005)
Geography	Applied Science (2005)
Government and Politics	Sociology
Health and Social Care (2005)	Welsh
	Welsh Second Language

* Subject criteria have been developed for these titles but their future is under review

<i>Key skills</i>	
Application of number	Improving own learning and performance
Communication	Problem solving
Information technology	Working with others

<i>Adult literacy and numeracy</i>	
Adult literacy	Adult numeracy

Appendix 5

Certificate design

Qualification certificate design

The following details should form the minimum requirements that the regulatory authorities would expect an awarding body to include on an accredited qualification certificate. There may be additional requirements for particular qualifications.

- 1 The full name of the awarding body.
- 2 Partnerships between awarding bodies may be shown, provided these have been agreed by the regulatory authorities during the accreditation process.
- 3 Candidate name as registered.
- 4 The accredited qualification title – prominently shown and in the form agreed by the regulatory authorities at accreditation.
- 5 The national accreditation number for the qualification.
- 6 A unique identifier or code for each certificate to enable audit activity, or an assurance that the certificate may be used for audit purposes. The candidate number may be used for this purpose, providing the awarding body is able to distinguish between multiple certificates awarded to the same candidate.
- 7 Security arrangements for certificate design and issue should be defined in the submission for accreditation; the awarding body must ensure that there is a secure system for handling certificates and their issue is covered by an audit trail.
- 8 If the qualification is graded, then the grade must be shown on the certificate.
- 9 Date (month/year) on/during which awarding body confirms achievement of the qualification by issue of a certificate.
- 10 Signature of single point of accountability at the awarding body, with printed name and title.
- 11 Certificate details to be issued in English or English and Welsh where appropriate.
- 12 The relevant regulatory authorities' logo(s) (ie for NVQs – QCA's logo only; for all other qualifications – the three regulatory authorities' logos). Electronic versions and advice on their use may be sought by telephoning 020 7509 5776 or by emailing accreditation1@qca.org.uk.
- 13 General advice on certificate design and interpretation of these guidelines may be sought by telephoning 020 7509 5776 or by emailing accreditation1@qca.org.uk.

Unit certificate design¹⁵

The following details should form the minimum requirements that the regulatory authorities would expect an awarding body to include on a unit certificate of an accredited qualification. There may be additional requirements for particular qualifications.

- 1 The full name of the awarding body.
- 2 The accredited unit title(s) – prominently shown and in the form agreed by the regulatory authorities at accreditation.
- 3 Candidate name as registered.
- 4 The national accreditation number(s) for the unit(s).
- 5 If the unit(s) is/are graded, then the grade(s) must be shown on the certificate.
- 6 Date (month/year) on/during which awarding body confirms achievement of the unit(s) by issue of a certificate.
- 7 The signature of single point of accountability at the awarding body, with printed name and title.
- 8 An indication that the unit certificate forms part of an accredited qualification (the full name of the accredited qualification need not be given).
- 9 Certificate details to be issued in English or English and Welsh where appropriate.

Further guidance

- A unique identifier or code for each unit certificate to enable audit activity, or an assurance that the certificate may be used for audit purposes. The candidate number may be used for this purpose, providing the awarding body is able to distinguish between multiple certificates awarded to the same candidate.
- Security arrangements for certificate design and issue should be defined in the submission for accreditation; the awarding body must ensure that there is a secure system for handling certificates and their issue is covered by an audit trail.
- The use of the regulatory authorities' logos on unit certificates remains optional (ie for NVQs – QCA's logo only; for all other qualifications – the three regulatory authorities' logos). Electronic versions and advice on their use may be sought by telephoning 020 7509 5776 or by emailing accreditation1@qca.org.uk.

General advice on certificate design and interpretation of these guidelines may be sought by telephoning 020 7509 5776 or by emailing accreditation1@qca.org.uk.

¹⁵ Information on the level and size of the unit will be required according to a timetable to be published by the regulatory authorities.

Appendix 6

National Occupational Standards

The criteria for National Occupational Standards

Introduction

National Occupational Standards are developed by the key employment sectors of the United Kingdom. Representatives of regulatory bodies across the United Kingdom and the Sector Skills Development Agency approve the National Occupational Standards on behalf of the National Occupational Standards Board.

The National Occupational Standards Board has developed the following criteria for approval of the standards.

1 Content and characteristics of National Occupational Standards

National Occupational Standards must:

- reflect best employment practice, benchmarked against European and international standards where appropriate;
- describe the main roles and responsibilities within a defined occupational area;
- describe the outcomes of competent performance;
- take the form of units based on the occupational roles and responsibilities identified;
- include the essential knowledge and understanding required, the relevant technical, planning and problem-solving skills, the ability to work with others, the ability to apply knowledge and understanding, and other skills which will enhance flexibility in employment and opportunities for progression;
- ensure that the competence is broad enough to give flexibility in employment and be capable of adaptation to meet new and emerging occupational patterns and demands;
- meet the needs and have the support of all significant groups of employers and potential users;
- avoid duplication of effort, where at all possible, by looking to adopt other sector bodies' standards which describe the same responsibility or responsibilities.

Units within National Occupational Standards must:

- provide a basis for informing Human Resource systems and other related activities within organisations;
- be capable of providing a basis for assessment when used to inform qualification design.

In order to achieve this, units need to:

- include any statutory or legal obligations;

- include any health and safety requirements;
- include any relevant sustainable development aspects which are critical to competence;
- include any relevant occupational requirements which are ethical or value-based;
- be written in plain language and in a format which is easily understood by all those who will use the standards;
- be free from any overt or covert discrimination against an individual or group of individuals either in the wording or content.

Competence is defined as the ability to apply knowledge, understanding, practical and thinking skills to be effective in work; these skills will usually include problem-solving, being flexible to meet changing demands and the ability to work with or alongside others.

2 Analysis of the occupational sector

National Occupational Standards must be based on a thorough analysis of the characteristics of the sector and in particular the nature of the main occupations within it. A sector analysis must include information about:

- the types of occupations within the sector and any anticipated changes in employment patterns;
- opportunities for progression and clarification of the typical career routes open to individuals, including the role played by qualifications;
- the links between the sector and other related sectors, including opportunities to work with other sector bodies to identify common competences;
- the relationship between the standards and the main roles and responsibilities of occupations identified within the sector;
- the role played by key organisations including trade unions and any professional and statutory bodies within the sector; and
- the information sources that have been used to make the analysis that might contribute to further development of National Occupational Standards.

3 Approval of National Occupational Standards

- The National Occupational Standards must be endorsed as meeting the needs of users by all significant groups of employers and interested parties.
- Each sector body is required to submit its proposed National Occupational Standards for approval by the National Occupational Standards Board in accordance with published procedures.
- The outcomes (National Occupational Standards, qualification structures and assessment strategies) must be available without charge for use by awarding bodies and UK regulatory authorities in qualifications accredited to the National Qualifications Framework or accredited by the Scottish Qualifications Authority, or for use by higher education for qualifications in the Framework for Higher Education. National Occupational Standards must also be available without charge for use by the Sector Skills Development Agency to create a freely available database of National Occupational Standards linked to relevant qualifications databases of the UK regulatory authorities.

Appendix 7

Glossary

<i>Term</i>	<i>Definition</i>	<i>Notes</i>
Accreditation	The process through which the regulatory authorities confirm that a qualification and the associated specification conform to the regulatory criteria.	
Additional unit	A unit that can be taken alongside a qualification, while not being required for achievement of the qualification.	
Aegrotat award	An award made to a candidate who is unable, through temporary illness, injury or indisposition to complete all the usual assessment requirements.	
Aggregation	The process of combining (by summation or another agreed procedure) the marks or other units of credit awarded through an assessment scheme.	
Appeal	A process through which an awarding body may be challenged on the outcome of an enquiry about results or, where appropriate, other procedural decisions affecting a centre or individual candidates.	
Applied GCE/GCSE	A qualification where the specification requires candidates to develop and apply their knowledge, skills and understanding of a subject within a particular, often work-related context.	<p>The GCSEs in applied subjects currently available are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ applied art and design; ■ applied business; ■ applied ICT; ■ applied science; ■ engineering; ■ health and social care; ■ leisure and tourism; ■ manufacturing. <p>The GCE subjects to be available from September 2005 are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ applied art and design; ■ applied business; ■ applied ICT; ■ applied science; ■ engineering; ■ health and social care; ■ leisure studies; ■ media: communication and production; ■ performing arts; ■ travel and tourism.

Assessment	The process of making judgements about the extent to which a candidate's work meets the assessment criteria for a qualification or unit, or part of a unit.	
Assessment criteria	The requirements that candidates need to meet in order to achieve success (or a given grade) in a qualification or unit, or part of a unit.	
Assessment specification	A description of the methods and processes (and tasks where appropriate) to be used to assess a qualification or unit.	
Assessor	The person who assesses a candidate's work.	
Authentication	Confirmation that work has been produced by the candidate who is putting it forward for assessment, and where applicable that it has been produced under the required conditions. Confirmation by an awarding body from its records that a candidate was awarded a qualification that he or she claims to have been awarded.	Typically in the form of a statement by a candidate's tutor, employer, etc. Some qualifications also require the candidate to make a statement of authenticity. Where work is part of a collaborative effort, authentication also states the candidate's role in the work.
Awarding	The process through which candidates' results and/or grades are determined on the basis of available evidence.	
Awarding body	An organisation or consortium that awards qualifications.	To be eligible to award accredited qualifications, awarding bodies must meet the requirements of the regulatory authorities.
Candidate	A person who is registered with an awarding body for a qualification or unit.	
Centre (or assessment centre)	An organisation or consortium accountable to an awarding body for the assessment arrangements leading to a qualification or units.	A centre could, for instance, be an educational institution, training provider or employer. It may operate across more than one organisation or site.
Centre approval	A process through which a centre wishing to offer particular qualifications is confirmed as being able to maintain the required quality and consistency of assessment and comply with other expectations of the awarding body.	
Centre registration	A process through which a centre wishing to offer particular qualifications is recorded as having committed itself to maintain the required quality and consistency of assessment and comply with other expectations of the awarding body.	

Certificate	The record of attainment in a unit or qualification issued by the awarding body.	The design of the certificate must conform to the regulatory authorities' guidelines in Appendix 5.
Code of Practice	Principles and practices specified by the regulatory authorities against which awarding body processes and procedures for the assessing and awarding of particular qualification types are designed and evaluated.	
Comparability	The extent to which marks, grades or results are equivalent between centres, between awarding bodies and over time.	
Competence	The ability to carry out activities to the standards required.	
Condition (of accreditation)	Requirements which awarding bodies must meet, with deadlines, relating to non-compliance with criteria, which, although important, are not deemed sufficiently serious to delay an accreditation decision.	Conditions may be imposed at the accreditation stage or after initial accreditation if this is deemed to be in the interests of the learner.
Content	The coverage of a qualification, programme, module, unit or other component, expressed as the knowledge, understanding, skills or area of competence that is covered.	
Enquiry about results	A process through which an awarding body may be asked to check one or more of the steps leading to a reported result.	
External assessment	A form of independent assessment where assessment tasks are set, and candidates' work assessed, by the awarding body.	
External verifier	An individual appointed by the awarding body to ensure accurate and consistent standards of assessment, across centres and over time.	
Grade	A point on a scale of performance used to differentiate achievement within a qualification (for example: A, B, C, D, E, F, G; Distinction, Merit).	
Independent assessment	Assessment of candidates' work that is carried out by assessors who do not have a vested interest in the outcome.	
Internal assessment	Assessment where assessment tasks are set, and candidates' work assessed, wholly within the candidate's centre, subject where appropriate to external moderation or verification.	

Internal verifier	An individual appointed by the centre to ensure accurate and consistent standards of assessment, both between assessors operating within a centre and between centres offering the same award.	
Key skills	General skills that assist in improving learning and performance regardless of the specific area of study.	The regulatory authorities have developed standards for six key skills: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ application of number; ■ communication; ■ information technology; ■ improving own learning and performance; ■ working with others; ■ problem solving.
Level	The level at which a qualification or unit is positioned in the National Qualifications Framework.	A qualification may be made up of units that are not all regarded as being at the same level.
Level indicator	A statement describing the characteristics of qualifications at a particular level in the National Qualifications Framework.	Qualifications in the National Qualifications Framework will be expected to reflect the appropriate level indicator, although not all of the characteristics will necessarily be relevant.
Mandatory unit	A unit that must be achieved as part of a specified qualification.	
Mark scheme	Detail of how marks are to be awarded in relation to a particular assessment task.	A mark scheme normally indicates the number of marks each question or component of the task attracts. It may also indicate acceptable answers or criteria for awarding marks.
Moderation	The process of checking that assessment standards have been applied correctly and consistently between assessors, between centres and over time, and making adjustments to results where required to compensate for any differences in standard that are encountered.	See also 'Verification'.
Monitoring	The review of, and reporting on, the awarding body's quality assurance arrangements by the regulatory authorities or the awarding body.	

National Occupational Standards	Statements which describe the outcomes of competent work in an occupational field.	National Occupational Standards are developed by recognised sector bodies and approved by the appropriate mechanism.
National Qualifications Framework (NQF)	The framework used by the regulatory authorities to position qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.	
Optional unit	A unit that can be selected as part of a qualification or programme.	Qualification specifications may include rules about the number and combinations of optional units or components that are required or allowed.
Qualification	An award made by an awarding body for demonstration of achievement or competence.	The regulatory authorities can accredit qualifications which: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ are external public awards, ie they are not internal certificates made by an employer to its staff or trainees, or by a college to its students; ■ are permanent – once achieved, they are retained by the candidate; ■ are not degrees or other higher education awards made by degree-awarding institutions acting in their own right.
Qualification specification	A detailed statement defining the purpose, content, structure and assessment arrangements for a qualification.	
Reasonable adjustments	Arrangements which are approved in advance of an examination or assessment to allow attainment to be demonstrated by candidates with either a permanent or long-term disability or learning difficulty, or a temporary disability, illness or indisposition	
Regulatory authorities (for qualifications)	Government-designated statutory organisations required to establish national standards for qualifications and secure consistent compliance with them.	The regulatory authorities for qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland are respectively QCA, ACCAC and CCEA.
Reliability of assessment	The extent to which assessment results are an accurate measurement of the candidates' demonstration of the abilities specified by the assessment criteria.	

Result determination	The process by which awarding bodies use the information from assessments to determine individual candidates' results.	
Sector body	A body (such as a sector skills council) recognised by the regulatory authorities as responsible for formulating and reviewing standards of occupational competence for an employment sector.	
Special arrangements		Special arrangements are now referred to as reasonable adjustments to bring usage into line with the wording of legislation on equal opportunities.
Special consideration	Procedures implemented at the time of an examination to allow attainment to be demonstrated by candidates who have suffered temporary illness, injury or indisposition at the time of the examination.	
Staged assessment	Assessment arrangements in which assessment units are taken throughout a period of learning.	
Standardisation of assessment	A process to ensure that the assessment criteria for a qualification, unit or component are applied consistently by assessors, moderators and verifiers.	Standardisation can be carried out within centres (internal standardisation) as well as by awarding bodies across their centres.
Synoptic assessment	A form of assessment that tests candidates' understanding of the connections between the different elements of a subject.	
Title (of qualification)	A short description that states the type of qualification, the qualification level and its area of coverage.	The full title specifies the name of the awarding body; the qualification level; the generic name of the qualification, eg Certificate, National Diploma, NVQ, GCSE; and a name indicating its area of coverage.
Unit (of a qualification)	The smallest part of a qualification that is capable of certification in its own right.	Units may be designed as part of a specific qualification or group of qualifications, or designed independently (eg to be taken for stand-alone certification or to attract credit and be built up towards qualifications). Units may consist of separately assessed components. None of this implies that units must be taught or delivered as discrete entities.

Unit specification	A detailed statement defining the title, content, assessment arrangements, credit value and level for a unit.	
Validity	The fitness of purpose of an assessment tool or scheme.	
Verification	A process of moderation that includes local checking of assessment processes and decisions.	See also 'Moderation'.

About this publication

Who's it for? This document is for awarding bodies, sector bodies, Sector Skills Councils, professional bodies and organisations involved in the delivery of accredited qualifications.

What's it about? This document specifies, in the form of criteria, the characteristics necessary for any qualification to be accredited and admitted into the National Qualifications Framework. It also specifies the processes and procedures required to ensure high quality, consistency and rigorous standards in assessment and awarding across all qualifications within the framework and over time.

It replaces This document replaces the August 2003 consultation version of *The revised regulatory criteria* and the *Arrangements for the statutory regulation of external qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland 2000*.

Related material *The regulatory authorities' accreditation handbook* gives information and guidance on awarding body recognition and the accreditation of qualifications.

Updates Please refer to the regulatory authorities' websites for updates to this document.

What's it for? To establish transparent and consistent arrangements for the regulation of qualifications and promote public confidence in the quality, rigour, cost effectiveness and consistency of standards within and across qualifications.

This publication has been sent to:

Awarding bodies, sector bodies, Sector Skills Councils, the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education and inspection and funding agencies.

For more information or further copies, contact:

- In England:
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