

QCF – what it means and why should we use it?

PURPOSE

To support a qualifications system which is:

- Inclusive
- Responsive
- Accessible
- Non-bureaucratic

Inclusive – able to recognise needs of learners in a flexible way

Responsive – recognise needs of employers and industries and ensure that these can be kept up to date

Accessible – clear design features and easy to understand

Non-bureaucratic – will operate according to mutual trust (ie everyone will recognise the credit from QCF units) supported by a proportionate approach to regulation and quality assurance

HOW IT WORKS

- Units are developed using the design principles but they must be able to contribute to a full qualification
- They are submitted to a databank
- The achievement for each unit is assessed by assessment criteria and each unit must be freestanding in terms of its assessment
- Each unit is awarded an amount of credit – 1 unit of credit = 10 hours of total learning (not guided learning) so units will be different sizes with different amounts of credit
- Qualifications are developed with rules of combination using those units
- All of the above has to be accredited

NB units can be developed by an organisation accredited to do that, as can the rules of combination and the awarding of a qualification but an organisation may be approved to do either the first, second or all of the above. Or 3 different organisations can do each one.

TIMELINE

It is likely that 2010 will be the end of the NQF and the full use of the QCF. Any NQF qualification submitted for accreditation now only has a life till the end of 2010. So it makes sense to submit QCF qualifications now to future proof them.

ADVANTAGES FOR SHE QUALIFICATIONS OF USING THIS FORMAT

- QCF qualifications can contain units assessed in different ways eg the knowledge could be formally tested by an exam or by a project which shows how the knowledge can be applied, or by observing performance evidence
- QCF qualifications can have rules of combination which allows a number of routes with a core – advantageous for a qualification to meet varying needs eg small processing plant operators, brickworks, etc
- QCF qualifications can contain units at different levels eg if a Level 4 unit was to key to everyone then it could be in a Level 3 or a Level 5 qualification. The rules state that at least 60% of the credit awarded (not the units) should be at the level of the qualification
- QCF units must be recognised throughout so exemptions could be granted against relevant units from elsewhere, eg an environmental unit, or a relevant training company based unit. This leads to real joined up training for people
- When people want to progress they can start to take the units that they see as relevant to their job and gradually build up their required units over a period of time, making the whole process more flexible and relevant.
- QCF units are recorded on the Learner's database as each learner will get a unique learner number which will stay with them throughout their life – fulfilling the move towards life long learning.

PROPOSAL

Having had an "interest" at all three consultations the above would seem to very much meet the needs that were expressed at those consultations. So I would propose that the industry consider using the SHE as a first stage towards this sector moving its qualifications to this new structure. EMP is willing and keen to manage this process but will need to have help from industry experts at every stage of the writing of the units and rules of combination. However, EMP is well placed to do this with its links with its centres, the main companies within the industry plus its support for this from the smaller companies represented by BAA plus the interest from the brick-making sector. This is the ideal time to do this as the NOS have been reviewed and the qualification will need some revision.

Carol Pillinger
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