

# **Flexible Delivery – Unit Funding Trials (UFT) Adult Skills Budget 10/11**

## **Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF)**

### **Guidance and Information**

The intended audience for this document are providers involved with the 'Flexible Delivery – Unit Funding Trials' for 2010/2011.

**29 March 2011**

## Purpose

1. This document offers guidance to providers involved in the Flexible Delivery - Unit Funding Trials 2010/11 and should be read along with the "Frequently Asked Questions" for the trials which will be produced following the event of 29 March 2011. The trials are being taken forward as part of the Skills Funding Agency's (Agency) ongoing implementation of the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF), with provision delivered through the single Adult Skills Budget during 2010/11.
2. As part of the support for Flexible Delivery - Unit Funding Trials (UFT) we will continue to produce specific updates for providers as and when necessary. Although the trials run for the whole of the current delivery year, we will be publishing an interim evaluation report on the progress and emerging outcomes arising from the trials at the end of March 2011 and a final evaluation report at the end of August 2011.

## Background and introduction

3. Since April 2010 the Agency has been actively focussing funding on provision in the QCF and away from provision in the National Qualifications Framework (NQF). The QCF itself is now almost complete with vocational qualifications. There are over 7,000 vocational qualifications in the QCF and over 30,000 units. This means the QCF is now an operational reality. And the majority of publicly funded provision for adult learners in England is now drawn from the QCF.
4. Going forward we expect to see the population of the QCF go into a steady state and, although there will continue to be development of unit based and credit bearing qualifications, we do not expect to now enter into a period of consolidation for the QCF.
5. Having made the QCF an 'operational reality' the focus on implementation going forward now needs to be on realising the flexibilities that the QCF as a unit and credit based qualification framework can deliver to learners and employers. As well as understanding the role of the QCF within a reformed Adult Skills system and its relationship with areas such as Next Step and Learning Accounts. The Coalition Government's aspiration for the reform of the skills system is set out in the Skills Strategy ([Skills for Sustainable Growth](#), November 2010) along with the Skills Investment Strategy (Further Education – New Horizon Investing in Skills for Sustainable Growth) contains a clear commitment to the ongoing implementation of the QCF. Going forward we now need to continue to work with key delivery partners (Sector Skills Councils, awarding organisations and providers) to better understand how the QCF can support innovation in delivery, flexibility in learning, and the facility to accumulate nationally recognised achievement in smaller steps. Critically we want to work with the sector to understand local learner and employer demand for flexibility in delivery and

for credit accumulation and transfer (CAT) and to also understand how CAT might be part of supporting greater freedoms and flexibilities across the sector.

6. We would like to see the unit funding trials build the case and demonstrate the emerging benefits of a system where learners can undertake learning more flexibly, can accumulate credit and can transfer that credit towards qualifications. From the Agency's side we want to understand what the funding and performance inhibitors may be in delivering greater flexibility and to feed this into the work that is now underway to put in place a simpler funding methodology. From a provider side, we want to support the building of evidence for the demand for a 'credit market', including action research and case studies that can show the benefits to the individual and to the employer of a more flexible system.

## **Objectives of the Trials**

7. In July of last year the Agency took the decision to launch a new set of unit funding trials to test flexible delivery of the QCF within the Adult Learner Responsive budget. These trials have been progressing with 18 providers participating and delivery is within 2010/11.
8. The main focus of the trials has been around flexibility in qualification delivery, with providers delivering units which are within the Rules of Combination (RoC) of QCF qualifications already confirmed for funding. The providers have also been focussing on whether and how a more flexible approach to delivery can better support adults who may be returning to learning after a period away, or who are seeking to enhance existing skills to increase their employability.
9. In February 2011, the Agency extended the trials and invited new [Expressions of Interest](#) from ALR providers. As before delivery needed to be within the existing single Adult Skills Budget for 2010/11 and providers required to start delivery immediately. The Agency received 72 Expression of Interests and 61 providers have now been confirmed as part of the expansion.
10. In taking forward the second expansion of unit funding trials, we identified a range of high level objectives which framed the Expressions of Interest for providers to become involved in the trials. The objectives are:
  - To look at how flexible delivery of qualifications can be supported
  - To look at how learners can begin to accumulate and transfer credit
  - To look at how flexible or 'unitised delivery' can enhance learner access to and achievement of qualifications

- To look at how flexible or ‘unitised delivery’ can stimulate co-investment from learners and employers.
  - Look at how unitised delivery allows learners and employers access to learning which enhances their existing qualifications and increases their employability and skills.
  - Look at how flexible unitised delivery breakdowns qualifications to support learner and employer needs.
  - Establish a credit market for unitised delivery to support the QCF.
  - Finally to look at how colleges can begin to work strategically with Awarding Organisations.
11. We have already approved and made available 917 units to be used as part of these Unit Funding Trials. In addition the Agency has agreed to add a further 600 units. As before the additional units have been reviewed to ensure that they are within the Rules of Combination for a qualification already confirmed for funding by the Agency.
12. We are in the process of finalising the list and these units will become available through the Learning Aim Database (LAD) from April 2011 for providers to use.

### **Individualised Learner Record (ILR)**

13. Providers are expected to complete all the ILR fields in compliance with guidance published by the Information Authority for mainstream funded provision through their Adult Budget return.
14. In addition providers are required to enter **code ‘122’ in field A46** – Special projects and pilots.

### **Identifying Available Learning Aims**

15. Providers involved in the trial are able to deliver QCF qualification confirmed for funding by the Skills Funding Agency. In addition providers will be able to record QCF units confirmed for funding by the Skills Funding Agency specifically for use in the trials. The list of confirmed units can be found on the Skills Funding Agency website alongside the list of providers eligible to take part in the [trials](#).
16. All providers involved with the 2010/11 trials can access the units listed on the confirmed list, this includes the new members the Agency has agreed as part of the expansion.
17. To support the recording of the confirmed units for the trials on the ILR, the units have been added to the Learning Aim Database (LAD).
18. **Please note that only providers participating in the Unit Funding Trials are eligible to record the units as fundable in the ILR and all these units must be approved by the Agency in advance.**

19. To ensure that the identified units are recorded as fundable only by eligible providers the Agency will be tracking the use of the unit codes using the learning aim reference, the provider UPIN and the designated code in the Special Projects and Pilots field (A46).
20. If you have any queries about the information showing on the LAD, contact the [QCF team](#).

## **Personal Learning Record**

21. We are also using the trials to raise awareness of the Personal Learning Record (PLR). The PLR can be used to support the accumulation and transfer of achievement for all vocational qualifications within the QCF as it can provide an on line record of a learner's achievement within the QCF.
22. The Agency has developed a PLR and a small number of awarding organisations have signed up to use the PLR. We are in discussions with Ofqual and the federation of Awarding Bodies and individual awarding organisations around how we can work together to take forward future developments around a PLR .
23. The Agency is keen to support the ongoing development and deployment of the PLR and to raise awareness of its use and potential. Therefore we are highlighting the potential of the PLR to providers involved in the trial. .
24. For more information and general guidance on the Personal Learning Record visit the [Learning Records Service](#) website.

## **Evaluation of the Trials**

25. [Ekosgen](#) in partnership with [education relations](#) has been commissioned to conduct an evaluation of the trials. The evaluation began in December 2010 and will conclude in July 2011.
26. The evaluation has been commissioned to help understand and develop this area of work by assessing the delivery, implementation and impact of the trials. There is a particular interest in capturing case studies of emerging approaches to flexible delivery, understanding learner demand for flexible delivery and credit accumulation and transfer and how far there may be emerging evidence of the benefits of flexible delivery to learners and employers.
27. The study is in line with the Government's aim of a skills system that better meets the needs of learners and employers. The team has therefore been asked to gather evidence of providers working flexibly on the delivery of

units, to identify innovation, good practice that is taking place and to track the journey providers are following through the trials.

28. Following on from this we want to have a better understanding of how providers are using QCF flexibilities in a 'live' operational environment. As part of the evaluation the Agency is keen to assess the costs and affordability of flexible delivery from a learner and provider perspective and is particularly interested in costs associated with awarding organisations.
29. The evaluation team has already been working closely with the first 19 providers, and will shortly be publishing their interim report for these trials. Full details of the report will be available on the Skills Funding Agency website.
30. As before the contractors will continue to work with providers involved in the trials and focusing on the following areas;
  - Affordability;
  - Learner Motivation;
  - Unit Credit Accumulation and Transfer (CAT)
  - Co-Investment
  - Responsiveness to local employer skills need.
31. Ekosgen is a leading UK research and evaluation company with a specialist Learning, Skills and Social Policy practice. They are working in partnership with Education Relations who have experience of delivering support programmes, including Foundation Learning, across the sector. .
32. For any queries or information regarding evaluation or research, please contact [Tim Allan](#) (ekosgen) on 07912 780202 or [Richard Sharples](#) (Education Relations) on 07711118407.

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