

Qualifications
& Credit
Framework

Claiming credit

Guidance on the recognition of prior learning
within the Qualifications and Credit Framework

Version 2



We want our website and publications to be widely accessible, so please contact QCDA if we're not meeting your needs.

Qualifications and Curriculum
Development Agency
53-55 Butts Road
Earlsdon Park
Coventry CV1 3BH

Telephone 0300 303 3010
Enquiry line 0300 303 3011
Textphone 0300 303 3012
Fax 0300 303 3014
info@qcda.gov.uk
www.qcda.gov.uk

QCDA/10/4726

ISBN: 978-1-84962-356-8

First published in 2010

© Qualifications and Curriculum Authority 2010

The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) is currently operating certain of its non-regulatory functions under the name of the Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency (QCDA). The legal entity remains QCA, established under the Education Act 1997. QCA is an exempted charity under the Charities Act 1993.

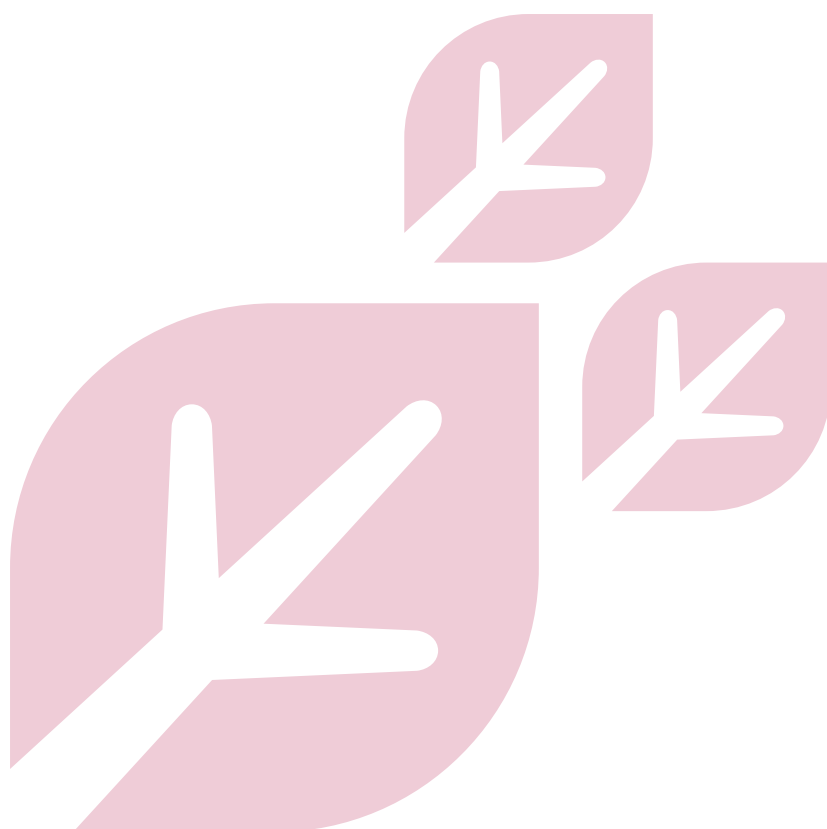
Reproduction, storage or translation, in any form or by any means, of this publication is prohibited without prior written permission of the publisher, unless within the terms of the Copyright Licensing Agency. Excerpts may be reproduced for the purpose of research, private study, criticism or review, or by educational institutions solely for educational purposes, without permission, provided full acknowledgement is given.

Contents

1	Introduction	5
1.1	What is 'the recognition of prior learning'?	5
1.2	The purpose of this guidance	5
1.3	Definition of RPL in the QCF	5
1.4	The requirements of awarding organisations	6
1.5	Why 'claiming credit'?	6
2	Principles of RPL	7
2.1	Principle 1	7
2.2	Principle 2	7
2.3	Principle 3	7
2.4	Principle 4	7
2.5	Principle 5	7
3	RPL in the QCF	8
3.1	The characteristics of the QCF	8
3.2	Units	8
3.3	Credits	9
3.4	RPL and qualifications	9
3.5	RPL, exemption and credit transfer	10
4	RPL in practice – from advice through to appeal	13
4.1	The RPL process	13
4.2	Stage 1: General awareness about claiming credit – information, advice and guidance	13
4.3	Stage 2: Pre-assessment – gathering evidence and giving information	13
4.4	Stage 3: Assessment/documentation of evidence	13
4.5	Stage 4: Feedback	14
4.6	Stage 5: Awarding credit	14
4.7	Stage 6: Appeal	14
4.8	An example of an RPL process	14



5	Extending the offer of RPL – from planning to action	15
5.1	Planning more RPL under the QCF	15
5.2	Staff development for RPL	16
6	The benefits of RPL	17
6.1	The motivation and role of the individual	17
6.2	The motivation and role of employers	17
6.3	The motivation and role of sector skills councils	17
6.4	The motivation and role of awarding organisations	18
6.5	The motivation and role of providers	18
6.6	The role of careers advice and guidance	19
7	Resourcing RPL	20
7.1	Adequate resources for RPL	20
7.2	Funding RPL in the QCF in England	20
	Glossary	21



1 Introduction

1.1 What is 'the recognition of prior learning'?

In recent years, there has been an increasing interest within qualifications frameworks across the world in how to recognise individuals' previous achievements.¹ There are several different ways in which this process is described. Terms like 'the accreditation of prior learning', 'the recognition of experiential learning' or 'the validation of informal learning' are all used in different frameworks in different countries. In the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF)² the term 'recognition of prior learning' has been adopted and abbreviated to RPL.³

1.2 The purpose of this guidance

This guidance is designed for organisations involved in the process of the recognition of prior learning through the award of credit within the QCF. The guidance is intended to help sector skills councils (SSCs), awarding organisations and providers to develop or update their own policies and guidelines for RPL to meet the requirements of the QCF. The guidance has been developed in consultation with our stakeholders and takes account of international and UK developments in RPL.

The guidance aims to contribute to simplifying the RPL processes, building mutual trust among practitioners and underwriting the reliability and validity of credit achievements made through RPL. Although the primary responsibility for establishing effective RPL processes in the QCF rests with the awarding organisations and their recognised centres, this process of building mutual trust and confidence in robust and accessible RPL arrangements across the QCF is one in which many other organisations have an interest.

This guidance also aims to widen access and create additional opportunities for the recognition of an individual's achievements. It can serve as a checklist for SSCs, awarding organisations and providers that are developing or reviewing their own RPL guidelines in the context of the QCF. The guidance may also help to develop assessment practice by opening up a wider range of assessment instruments and methods that are more responsive to the needs of individuals.

While the QCF offers the technical features that can support more RPL, individuals depend on the support and resources provided by stakeholders to put these into practice. The individual is central to the RPL process; it will ultimately be their choice and responsibility to decide whether to claim credit in the QCF through an RPL route.

1.3 Definition of RPL in the QCF

The *Regulatory arrangements for the Qualifications and Credit Framework* define RPL as follows:

A method of assessment that considers whether a learner can demonstrate that they can meet the assessment requirements for a unit through knowledge, understanding or skills they already possess and do not need to develop through a course of learning.⁴

In the context of the QCF, the definition of RPL is quite specific and relates to assessment leading to the award of credit. Assessment for RPL is conducted against the learning outcomes and assessment criteria of a unit and is subject to exactly the same quality assurance requirements as any other kind of assessment within the QCF.

¹ The European Inventory for the Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning shows that the number of people whose learning is accredited is increasing. Twenty-three Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries are working together on recognition of non-formal and informal learning; 32 European countries are working together on recognition of learning outcomes; and the EU has adopted the European Qualifications Framework, specifically mentioning the importance of enabling recognition of non-formal learning.

² The regulators of the QCF are the Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills (DCELLS) in Wales; the Office for Regulation of Qualifications and Examinations (Ofqual) in England; and the Council for the Curriculum Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) in Northern Ireland.

³ The process of documenting, assessing, validating and certificating learning gained outside the formal education and training system is known by many names. These different names are intended to signal different emphasis in the processes. However, they can be confusing, and it was decided by the steering group for this guidance document that RPL would be used throughout.

⁴ *Regulatory arrangements for the Qualifications and Credit Framework* (Ofqual/08/3726).

There are no separate quality standards for RPL in the QCF, simply quality standards that cover all types of assessment.

1.4 The requirements of awarding organisations

The *Regulatory arrangements for the Qualifications and Credit Framework* set particular requirements of awarding organisations in relation to RPL:

The awarding organisation must have in place the necessary systems, procedures and resources to ensure [that] achievement is recognised through the recognition of prior learning (RPL) where this is appropriate. (section 5.6h)

They also set a similar requirement for recognised awarding organisation centres:

The awarding organisation must have procedures in place to recognise, and monitor on an ongoing basis, centres⁵ to offer assessment leading to awards within the QCF. These procedures must ensure that each centre ... where appropriate, has in place arrangements that allow for recognition of prior learning (RPL). (section 5.11g)

All QCF awarding organisations must be able to offer assessment through RPL and all recognised centres must be capable of operating an RPL process. This does not mean that all individuals must be offered RPL in all cases. It does mean that awarding organisations must be able to make an offer of assessment through RPL 'where appropriate'. In the context of the QCF 'where appropriate' relates to the title of this guidance.

1.5 Why 'claiming credit'?

The system of credit that operates within the QCF is based on one of the key regulatory aims of the *Regulatory arrangements for the Qualifications and Credit Framework*:

The system must meet the needs of individual learners and offer choices of routes to achievement and opportunities for progression. (page 7)

The idea of 'claiming credit' reflects this aim. It places RPL in the context of an individual-centred approach to recognising achievements. Where an individual wishes to 'claim credit' for prior learning, awarding organisations must be able to respond positively to such a claim. 'We don't offer RPL' is not an acceptable position for either an awarding organisation or a centre to adopt within the QCF, and the *Regulatory arrangements for the Qualifications and Credit Framework* reflect this.

'Claiming credit' is a good description of the practical processes through which RPL operates within the QCF. It also helps to distinguish RPL from other similar processes in the QCF. These are considered in section 3. It may be useful in some instances to use the term 'claiming credit' instead of RPL in presenting these opportunities to individuals and inviting them to seek recognition of their achievements within the QCF.

⁵ An awarding organisation may choose to fulfil these functions itself.

2 Principles of RPL

This guidance has been developed from existing examples of good practice in recognising prior learning that have been developed in the UK and internationally. From these examples, five principles have been established. They are related here to the explicit context of the QCF, and are intended to support some of the more detailed guidance offered later in this document.

2.1 Principle 1

RPL is a valid method of enabling individuals to claim credit for units in the QCF, irrespective of how their learning took place. There is no difference between the achievement of the learning outcomes and assessment criteria of a unit through prior learning and through a formal programme of study.

2.2 Principle 2

RPL policies, processes, procedures, practices and decisions should be transparent, rigorous, reliable, fair and accessible to individuals and stakeholders to ensure that users can be confident of the decisions and outcomes of RPL.

2.3 Principle 3

RPL is a learner-centred, voluntary process. The individual should be offered advice on the nature and range of evidence considered appropriate to support a claim for credit through RPL, and be given guidance and support to make a claim.

2.4 Principle 4

The process of assessment for RPL is subject to the same quality assurance and monitoring standards as any other form of assessment. The award of credit through RPL will not be distinguished from any other credits awarded in the QCF.

2.5 Principle 5

Assessment methods for RPL must be of equal rigour as other assessment methods, be fit for purpose and relate to the evidence of learning. Credit may be claimed for any unit in the QCF through RPL unless the assessment requirements of the unit do not allow this, based on a rationale consistent with the aims and regulations of the framework.



3 RPL in the QCF

3.1 The characteristics of the QCF

International models of RPL have often found it difficult to reconcile the recognition of prior learning that has taken place outside the structure of a formal qualifications framework with the formal requirements of assessment and certification within it. The QCF has been developed to overcome such difficulties. It is capable of recognising any kind of achievement at any level through any mode or process of learning. This makes it particularly accessible to claims for credit through RPL.

3.2 Units

The QCF is a unit-based framework. All qualifications in the QCF are built up from units and all units are based on a standard design format. This standard unit format is based on the following features:

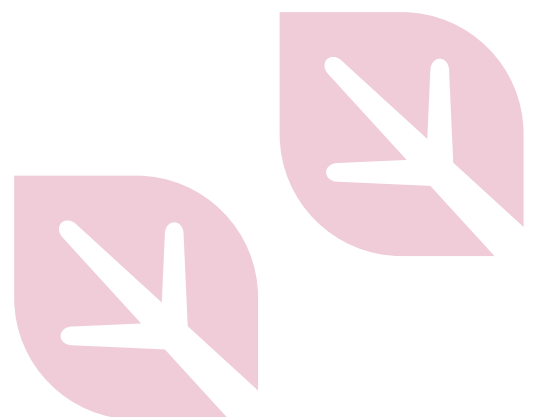
- title
- set of learning outcomes
- set of assessment criteria (linked to each of these outcomes)
- level
- credit value.

Individuals who can demonstrate through assessment that they are able to achieve the learning outcomes against the related assessment criteria will be awarded credits for that unit. The credit value identifies the number of credits that will be awarded, at the appropriate level, for completion of the unit.

This unit-based format provides the starting point for the RPL process. If an individual can demonstrate that they are able to meet the standard of the unit, defined by the learning outcomes and assessment criteria, then he or she can claim credits for that unit, irrespective of whether he or she prepared for assessment through a formally taught course or through previous experience.

It should be noted that the unit format used in the QCF does not prescribe that any particular method of assessment should be used (though some requirements may be set for assessment by an SSC in certain cases). This means that awarding organisations have flexibility in developing assessment methods to meet the needs of individuals. This is an important flexibility in developing an RPL offer.

So, a unit in the QCF defines the achievement for which an individual may claim credit and the number of credits at the appropriate level that can be claimed. It should be noted that there is no concept of 'partial achievement of a unit' in the QCF. All the learning outcomes of a unit must be achieved for credit(s) to be awarded, and the number of credits will always be defined by the credit value of the unit. There is no facility to claim or to be awarded some of the credits in a unit.



3.3 Credits

All achievements in the QCF lead to the award of credit. 'Claiming credit' is a comprehensive concept that applies to all achievements in the framework. Any unit within the QCF is capable of being assessed through an RPL process and, with the exceptions identified below, the opportunity to be awarded credit through RPL is a universal entitlement for all individuals in the QCF.

Only in exceptional instances, for which a rationale must be given, may an awarding organisation place restrictions on the award of credits through RPL. The organisation must specify these limits in the assessment requirements for the unit. Such exceptions may include:

- explicit requirements for a licence to practise
- health and safety requirements
- a condition of admission to a regulated profession
- where a unit requires that assessment takes place in a given setting and/or at a given time.

All credits are recorded in an electronic record, owned by the individual. All awarding organisations in the QCF are required to record all credits achieved within this personal learning record.

Individuals will be able to access their QCF achievement data through the Managing Information Across Partners (MIAP) personal learning record from September 2010. Additional functionality will be provided to help individuals plan future episodes of learning in the QCF. The Learning and Skills Council (from April 2010 the Skills Funding Agency) is currently working with awarding organisations to collect achievement to ensure the record is populated on release of QCF functionality. All credit achievements

will be recorded in the personal learning record. There is no separate identification of 'credits gained through RPL' and other types of credit achievement on the personal learning record.

The recording of credit on the personal learning record embodies the RPL principles set out above, and is an important tool for resolving some of the problems of recognising informal learning within formal qualifications frameworks that have arisen in other countries.

3.4 RPL and qualifications

All qualifications in the QCF are achieved through a process of credit accumulation. Individuals who wish to achieve a qualification must accumulate these credits according to designated rules of combination. These rules set out the requirements for defined numbers of credits to be achieved through particular units or groups of units, in order to meet the requirements of a named qualification.

As the credits that are accumulated towards a qualification are not separately identified as 'RPL credits' the opportunity to count credits gained through RPL is again a comprehensive offer across all qualifications in the QCF. Credits gained through RPL can count towards any qualification, at any level and in any subject/sector area, within the QCF, unless excluded by the requirements for award of a qualification.

In certain cases, an awarding organisation may set limits on the number of credits that may be 'counted' towards a qualification through RPL. This reflects some practices in higher education, where there are a set proportion of credits within any given qualification that may be gained through RPL. Such restrictions are actually quite difficult, and potentially expensive, to impose. To date, no qualifications in the QCF impose such restrictions.

3.5 RPL, exemption and credit transfer

One of the principles that informs 'claiming credit' in the QCF is that individuals should not be required to repeat things that they have already learnt. In fact, this principle underpins the concept of RPL in the QCF, and it also underpins two related but different processes: exemption and credit transfer.

As the term 'claiming credit' implies, the RPL process is relevant where an individual has previously learnt something but has never received formal recognition for this learning through a qualification or other form of certification. Within the QCF an individual is able to 'claim' that he or she knows or can do something already and does not need to attend a course to learn it again. If he or she can prove this claim (through assessment of relevant evidence), then credit can be awarded for that achievement in the same way as any other credits. In the QCF, RPL refers particularly to previously uncertificated learning, and achievements through RPL always lead to the award of credit.

Exemption

Within the *Regulatory arrangements for the Qualifications and Credit Framework*, 'exemption' is defined as:

The facility for a learner to claim exemption from some of the achievement requirements of a QCF qualification, using evidence of certificated, non-QCF achievement deemed to be of equivalent value. (page 40)

The definition includes the critical distinction between exemption and RPL in the QCF. The process of exemption is applied to certificated achievement; RPL to previously uncertificated achievement. The other key difference is that where exemption is granted, based on certificated achievement outside the QCF, no credits are awarded to the individual. In both cases, individuals' achievements are recognised, but 'exemptions' are deemed to be 'of equivalent value' to credits in the QCF, whereas RPL leads directly to the award of credit. More information about exemptions is available in *Guidance for developing rules of combination for the Qualifications and Credit Framework* (QCA/10/4727).

Credit transfer

As the definition of 'exemption' makes clear, the process relates exclusively to certificated learning outside the QCF. Within the QCF the principle of not repeating things already learnt also informs the process of credit transfer. So, although both exemption and credit transfer relate to certificated learning, one term relates to certification outside the QCF and the other — credit transfer — to certification within the QCF. Both exemption and credit transfer are separate processes from RPL, and awarding body systems need to reflect these distinctions. The operation of credit transfer in the QCF is described in greater detail in *Guidance for developing rules of combination for the Qualifications and Credit Framework* (QCDA/10/4727).



For individuals with learning or achievements that have not been certificated, it will be possible to assess and validate these through an RPL process.

A learner has worked in retail for the last five years. They would like to achieve a level 2 Award in Retail knowledge.

Learner and learning provider to establish opportunities for RPL.

Learning provider to conduct own research as to which QCF unit may be appropriate to RPL. Also make contact with awarding organisation to identify methods to assess this experience and follow a quality assurance RPL process implemented by awarding organisation.

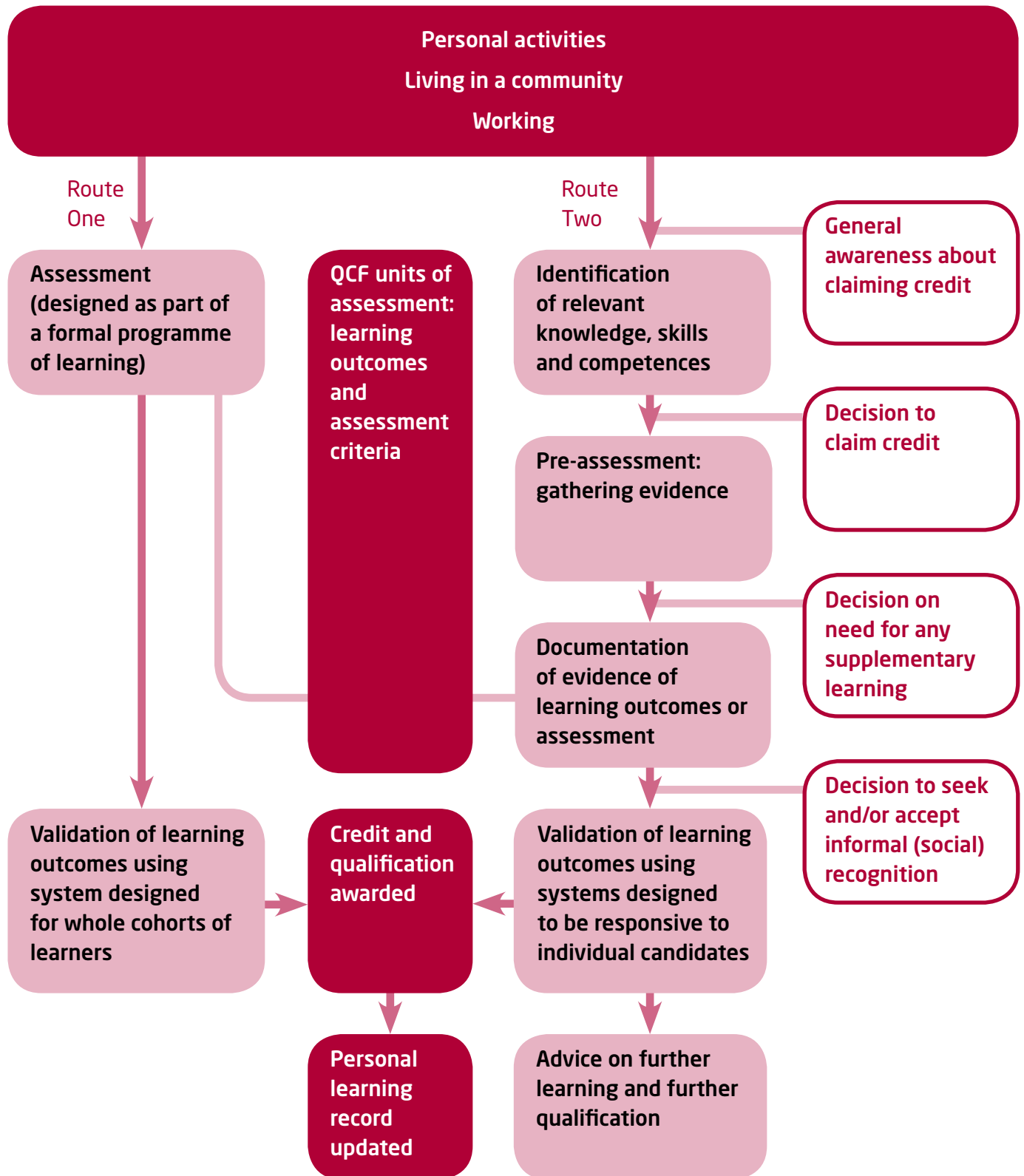
Unit recognised for RPL = Understanding customer service in the retail sector.

Learning provider to assess learner's experience against the assessment criteria and learning outcomes through a recognised approach recommended by awarding organisation. This could be a one-to-one discussion or a witness testament provided by a colleague.

Awarding organisation to verify evidence used for RPL and award credit for unit achieved.

Learner achieves 3 credits for Understanding customer service in the retail sector.

RPL routes from learning to certification in the QCF (adapted from the *European guidelines on the validation of non-formal and informal learning*)



4 RPL in practice – from advice through to appeal

4.1 The RPL process

The process of RPL involves individuals from the moment they consider making a claim and supports them through to the result of the assessment. Where procedures for RPL are new or underdeveloped, SSCs, learning providers and awarding organisations will need to go through a planning and pre-implementation phase to ensure they lay a solid foundation for successful RPL. Suggestions on how this might be done are included in section 5.

It is possible for an individual to follow more than one route to claim credit within the QCF. The following are the stages that an individual would take to make a claim for credit through RPL using an individually tailored route.

The process described below has been adapted from the *European guidelines on the validation of non-formal and informal learning* (www.nvr.nu/files/Validation_guidelines_7_November_2008.pdf).

4.2 Stage 1: General awareness about claiming credit – information, advice and guidance

When an individual indicates an interest in registering for a qualification in the QCF, the possibility that they may be able to claim credit for some of their previous learning needs to be raised with them. If the offer of RPL interests the individual at this initial stage they will need to know about:

- the process of claiming credit through RPL
- the sources of professional support and guidance available to individuals and employers
- the administrative processes for RPL applications
- timelines, appeals processes and any fees and/or subsidies available to support the process.

4.3 Stage 2: Pre-assessment – gathering evidence and giving information

If an individual decides to claim credit for prior learning, it is important that all the implications of this decision are made known, prior to any decision to begin collecting evidence to support this claim. This stage is vital to ensure that the candidate is:

- fully informed of the RPL process
- has sufficient support to make a viable claim
- able to make decisions about evidence collection and presentation for assessment.

During this stage the candidate will carry out the process of collecting evidence against the requirements of the unit or units through which credit is claimed. In some cases this may entail the development of an 'assessment plan' or similar tool to support the individual through this process. The evidence required for the award of credit will need to meet the assessment standard of the unit(s) expressed through the learning outcomes and assessment criteria, as well as any additional assessment requirements established for the unit(s).

4.4 Stage 3: Assessment/ documentation of evidence

Assessment as part of RPL is a structured process for gathering and reviewing evidence and making judgements about an individual's prior learning and experience in relation to unit standards.

Assessment must be valid and reliable to ensure the integrity of both the award of credit and the RPL system as a whole. The assessment process for RPL must be subject to the same quality-assurance procedures of awarding organisations as any other assessment process.

4.5 Stage 4: Feedback

After the assessment the assessor will, where practically possible, need to give feedback to the candidate, discuss the results and give support and guidance on the options available to the candidate, which may include, for example further learning and development. It is assumed that the assessor will also confirm to the individual whether or not a recommendation for the award of credits will be made. In all cases, once the assessment process is complete, the standard procedures for reporting results leading to the award of credit should be followed.

4.6 Stage 5: Awarding credit

Awarding organisations are responsible for awarding credit. The procedure is the same as for other forms of assessment and may vary between awarding organisations and between different centres. All credits achieved through RPL are recorded by the awarding organisation in the personal learning record in exactly the same way as all other credits.

4.7 Stage 6: Appeal

If claimants wish to appeal against a decision made about their claim for credit they would need to follow the standard appeals processes that exist within learning provider organisations and awarding organisations.

4.8 An example of an RPL process

The following extract shows how the process of RPL operates within one recognised awarding organisation within the QCF. It should be emphasised that this is not the only possible way in which RPL can be offered, but it does illustrate how the various stages of the process outlined above are delivered in practice:

University of the Arts London (UAL) Awarding Body offers QCF qualifications for the film industry. It has worked with Skillset, the SSC for the creative media industries, to develop and accredit qualifications for focus pullers and clapper loaders based on national occupational standards. The QCF qualifications that have been developed are a level 2 Diploma for clapper loaders and a level 3 Diploma for focus pullers.

UAL uses RPL to acknowledge previous training and experience gained in professional employment, which means individuals can meet the requirements of a unit within the qualifications without repeating any learning. It advises the individual to gather evidence of prior learning in a variety of ways, including practical demonstration, witness statements and other types of evidence that are appropriate. These processes and methods are quality assured by the chief examiner and quality manager at UAL.

University of the Arts London



5 Extending the offer of RPL – from planning to action

5.1 Planning more RPL under the QCF

The *Regulatory arrangements for the Qualifications and Credit Framework* include requirements that are intended to support the extension of the RPL offer across the widest possible range of qualifications and to the largest possible number of individuals. In order to meet the requirements of the regulators and to realise the intentions of the QCF in relation to RPL, it will be necessary for awarding organisations and recognised centres to establish clear plans for the development of an RPL offer. Other stakeholders (particularly SSCs) may actively support this process.

Plans for the development of RPL will need to:

- identify political and organisational barriers within the wider organisation to making an effective RPL offer
- address and resolve any known or anticipated problems in making an RPL offer to individuals
- ensure that those responsible for RPL processes are well informed and have appropriate knowledge and skills
- ensure that good practice in the conduct of the RPL process is applied consistently across centres, qualifications and individuals
- ensure that sources of funding are available to support an effective RPL offer of good quality.

Awarding organisations and centres operating within the QCF may want to carry out preparatory work in the following areas:

- auditing current practice, policy and procedures, including a description of quality-assurance processes

- establishing the purposes and intended outcomes of RPL, taking into account the sector qualifications strategy (this may vary by sector)
- looking at any external regulations and statutory requirements relating to RPL (such as professional body or statutory requirements and workplace arrangements and rules) and seeing whether any of these regulations enable or inhibit progression using RPL
- setting up the support structures candidates and staff need to achieve the aims of the sector and institution.

SSCs may want to identify:

- market needs/targets of the workforce and the sector
- which groups of employees are a priority for RPL and/or have the most pressing need for RPL
- strategies for building capacity for RPL within the awarding organisations and centres operating in a sector.

Awarding organisations are encouraged to develop:

- guidance for providers on appropriate assessment processes for RPL
- procedures governing the award of credit(s) that permit early recognition of achievement through RPL
- assessment methods and tools that can be used to support RPL
- guidance on moderation cycles/processes to support RPL
- administrative policies and procedures that support RPL

- a statement of the knowledge and skills RPL assessors are expected to have or be working towards
- training, guidance and support on all of the above processes to ensure RPL is fully understood and is part of standard assessment practice.

Providers may want to develop or address the following:

- how to implement RPL based on the guidance awarding organisations give
- how to ensure staff are able to recognise, plan and manage the RPL process
- ensuring that the resourcing of RPL is understood and implemented
- tailoring careers advice and guidance to individuals to support RPL
- encouraging staff to undertake training on RPL as part of their professional development.

5.2 Staff development for RPL

Lifelong Learning UK (LLUK) is the SSC responsible for the professional development of people working in the lifelong sector. LLUK is responsible for developing professional standards and approving the development of qualifications for people working in the lifelong learning sector. This includes people working in further education, community-based learning, work-based learning, library and information services, careers guidance and non-academic roles in higher education.

As part of its work LLUK has established, in collaboration with awarding organisations and universities, new initial teacher training qualifications for the lifelong learning sector based on new professional standards for teachers, tutors and trainers in England and Wales.

Within these qualifications a unit at level 3 on RPL has been developed. This unit is included as an optional unit within the Diploma to Teach in the Lifelong Learning Sector and is available to all awarding organisations and universities to use. The unit has been developed through the European Recognition of Prior Learning Outcomes (RPLO) project (www.rplo.eu) and reflects international best practice in RPL. People working in the lifelong learning sector who achieve credits through these RPL units as part of an LLUK-approved Diploma will be able to demonstrate that they have the skills and knowledge necessary to support an effective RPL process within their workplace.⁶

⁶ For more information, see Lifelong Learning UK (LLUK) *New professional standards for teachers, tutors and trainers in the lifelong learning sector* (2006) and *New professional standards for teachers, tutors and trainers in the lifelong learning sector in Wales* (2008); www.lluk.org.

6 The benefits of RPL

6.1 The motivation and role of the individual

In a labour market where employees change jobs with increasing frequency, there are many reasons for individuals to feel motivated to have their achievements recognised. Some individuals will begin studies bringing with them a range of experiences that may be suitable for RPL. The motivation for an individual wanting to claim credit through RPL could include:

- recognition of the skills and/or knowledge an individual already has
- to avoid duplication of learning
- recognition to boost self-esteem; this may be particularly important for those who are disengaged from learning
- employees wanting to avoid having to relearn knowledge or skills they already have in order to progress in a job or career
- employees wanting to get recognition for prior learning without having to participate in a learning programme
- for those returning to the workplace, a way to check whether their skills are up-to-date or whether they need some further learning or achievement to progress within or to re-enter the workplace.

6.2 The motivation and role of employers

Employers may use RPL to:

- make the skills and competences of their staff visible
- contribute to, and show commitment towards, workforce development
- retain staff
- validate learning and training that happens on the job
- check the knowledge, skills and competences of new workers
- fill skills gaps and shortages.

6.3 The motivation and role of sector skills councils

SSCs recognise the importance of a qualified workforce and many of them have indicated the need for more RPL to promote this. They are in a key position to play a leading role in promoting RPL in their sector.

SSCs may support RPL in order to:

- recognise skills, knowledge and competences important to their sector
- address skills shortages and gaps
- contribute to career development systems and staff development
- increase highly skilled and highly qualified workforces.

The actual role of SSCs in implementing RPL is likely to be most successfully carried out through relationships with awarding organisations. SSCs are in a key position to act in a promotional role as well as supporting awarding organisations to enhance the provision of RPL aimed at employers.



6.4 The motivation and role of awarding organisations

Awarding organisations play a leading role in:

- improving provision of and access to RPL
- quality assuring the RPL process
- raising confidence in RPL, including the mutual recognition of the outcomes of RPL between awarding organisations.

Awarding organisations have a responsibility to support both centres and individuals by providing materials and services relating to the effective conduct of assessment for all qualifications that they offer. This responsibility extends to the offer of RPL.

Guidance and support throughout the RPL process is important for both centres and individuals.

Awarding organisations should:

- provide materials and services that ensure RPL processes are transparent and simple to implement
- give both providers and individuals a clear sense of what each person must do to meet the requirements of assessment and certification.

Awarding organisations are increasingly giving advice and information that individuals can access directly, supporting centres in the process of guiding them through assessment and certification requirements. It is important that such advice — often provided electronically — is accessible and relevant to individuals who may be interested in RPL.

6.5 The motivation and role of providers

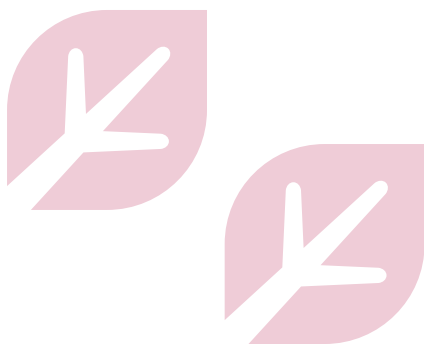
An increased capability and capacity for RPL within providers and in workplaces is essential for RPL in the QCF to become widely available. Providers and employers (for work-based practices) implement assessment and therefore RPL processes. Providers are also the most important point of contact with individuals.

The centre recognition requirements of the QCF provide a useful starting point for providers in establishing RPL processes. As the requirement to offer RPL is common to all awarding organisations, a provider can be assured that a set of RPL arrangements that meets the requirements of one awarding organisation will provide a sound basis for recognition by all others.

Providers may be motivated to provide RPL to:

- offer more individualised learning pathways for individuals to enable more inclusive provision
- raise the retention and success rate of individuals
- attract new groups of individuals to particular qualifications.

Providers are critical to the success of RPL because it depends on flexible approaches to assessment that link clearly to careers advice and guidance. In an increasingly demand-led system, providers that can show that they can offer such flexible provision will be well placed to attract individuals as well as public funding.



6.6 The role of careers advice and guidance

RPL is particularly important for individuals who lack formal qualifications — a group that is also a high priority for access to careers advice and guidance. There are two types of careers advice and guidance relevant to the RPL process:

- specialist advice provided by professionals who have been trained in RPL practice and procedures
- generic information, advice and guidance for individuals exploring their career and learning needs.

Specialist advice and guidance will be offered primarily by people experienced in RPL practice and procedures within learning provider organisations. Generic information, advice and guidance may come from publicly-funded careers advice and guidance services for adults. These services are different in different UK jurisdictions and are subject to changes in name and status.

In Wales, Careers Wales provides impartial careers information, advice and guidance for young people, adults, parents, employers and professionals (www.careerswales.com). Individuals in Wales also obtain information advice and guidance on learning options from learning coaches and from learning providers.

Information about careers guidance in Northern Ireland can be found at the Careers Service Northern Ireland (www.careersserviceni.com). The general telephone number for enquiries is 028 9044 1781. Further information about vocational qualification reform can be found at www.nivqrp.org.uk.

Learning providers themselves may also be useful sources of advice about the availability of RPL in a particular locality.



7 Resourcing RPL

7.1 Adequate resources for RPL

RPL can have many benefits for individuals, employers, SSCs, awarding organisations and providers, and there are wider benefits for the economy and society as well. To achieve these benefits will require:

- a whole organisational approach to RPL through adequate financial and human resources to ensure staff are competent to support RPL procedures
- new RPL guidelines, quality assurance, monitoring and review processes
- accessible information, advice and guidance for individuals and employers
- access to information and communication technology tools to support effective approaches to RPL.

7.2 Funding RPL in the QCF in England

From 2009-10 the Learning and Skills Council is introducing new funding arrangements for England that are explicitly aligned to the QCF. One feature of these new funding arrangements⁷ is support for the RPL process. The principle that informs these new arrangements is that, within limits, providers will be able to claim Learning and Skills Council funding leading to the award of credit through RPL, in exactly the same way as they would for a taught programme leading to the award of credit towards the same qualification.

This marks a major step forward in supporting the provision of effective RPL processes and should help awarding organisations and providers that seek to extend their RPL offer. In 2009-10 this arrangement will apply to the offer of assessment for up to 50% of the learning aim of a qualification. So, for example if a qualification has a credit value of 20, a provider would be able to claim

funding from the Learning and Skills Council for an RPL process that enabled an individual to claim up to 10 credits towards the qualification. It is reasonable to expect that the great majority claiming credit through RPL will claim less than half of the credit value of the qualification through this process. In this context the Learning and Skills Council approach is important in securing the expansion of RPL within the QCF in England. From April 2010 this approach will be taken forward by the new Skills Funding Agency.

Providers that receive public funding in England can find more information about the funding of RPL in *LSC funding guidance 2008/09: funding principles, rules and regulations* (final version) from www.lsc.gov.uk/providers/funding-policy/strategic-overview. In particular they will wish to refer to the section on 'Accreditation of prior experience and learning' for information (page 27, paragraphs 204-207) and the section on 'Prior attainment – proportion of funding remaining field A51a' for information on prior certificated learning for which exemption may be claimed within the QCF (pages 56-57, paragraphs 251-255).

The new Northern Ireland website provides a simple, comprehensive resource of information helping learning providers, employers and individuals adapt to vocational qualification reform and the QCF. Details can be found at <http://nivqrp.org.uk>. Funding information for learning providers in Northern Ireland can be found at www.nivqrp.org.uk/learning_providers/funding.

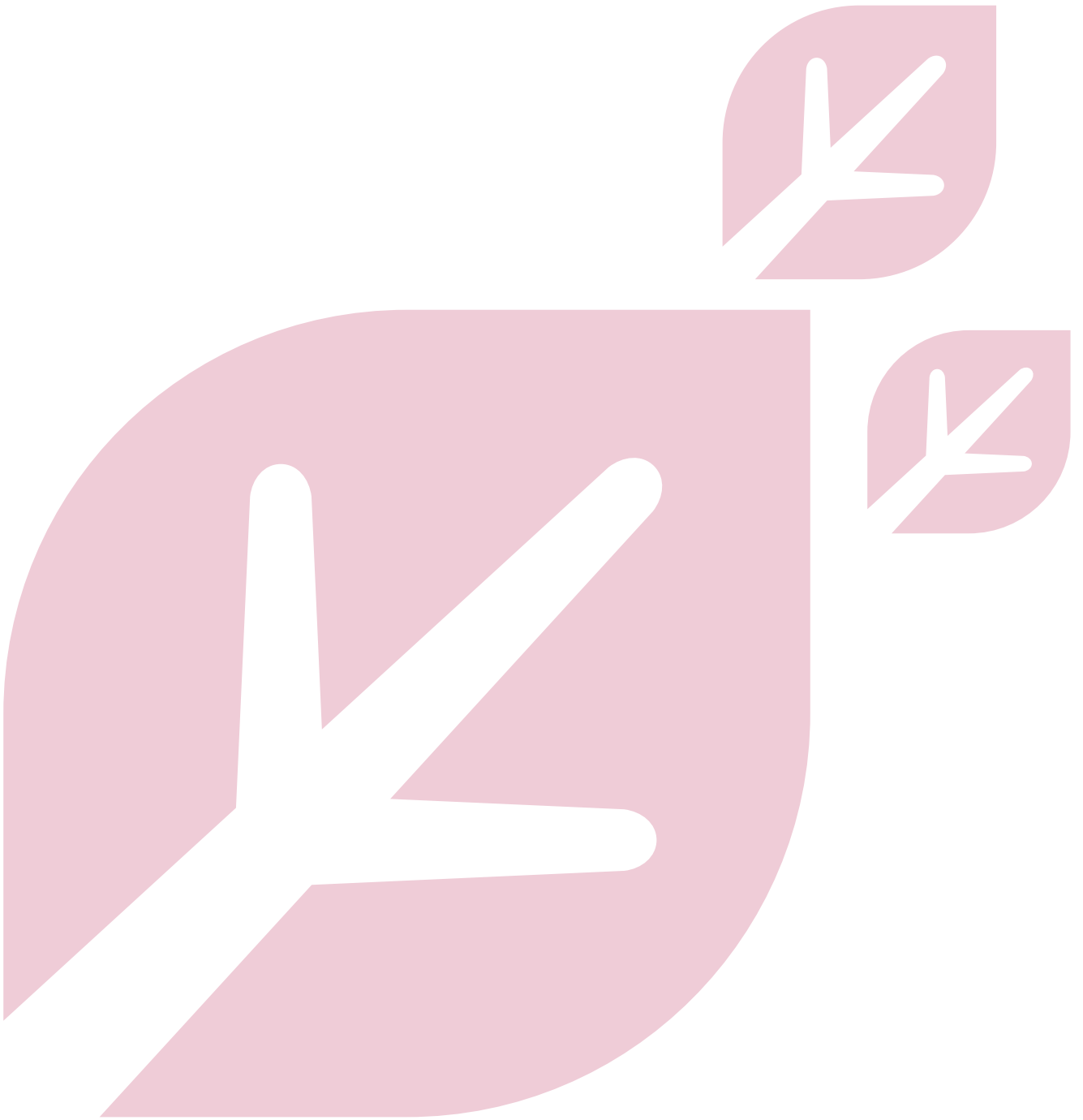
The Welsh Assembly Government's *Credit & Qualifications Framework for Wales (CQFW)* newsletter provides stakeholders with up-to-date information on the CQFW and the QCF in Wales, including funding updates. To receive a copy of this newsletter, please email: CQFWnewsletter@wales.gsi.gov.uk.

⁷ Regular updates to the Learning and Skills Council funding arrangements are published on the website www.lsc.gov.uk. As the Learning and Skills Council becomes the Young Peoples Learning Agency and Skills Funding Agency, separate funding arrangements will come into place from the 2010/11 funding year. Migration to the new organisations from 1 April 2010 can be monitored through the Learning and Skills Council website.

Glossary

Term	Definition
additional information	Information added to the designated design
appeal	The process through which an awarding organisation may be challenged on the outcome of an enquiry about results or, where appropriate, other procedural decisions affecting a centre or an individual
assessment	The process of making judgements about the extent to which an individual's work meets the assessment criteria of a unit, or any additional assessment requirements of a qualification
assessment criteria	Descriptions of the requirements an individual is expected to meet to demonstrate that a learning outcome has been achieved
assessment standard	The standard that an individual is expected to reach in order to achieve credit for a unit, expressed through a combination of the learning outcomes and assessment criteria of that unit
assessor	A person who assesses a learner's work
awarding	The process by which individuals' results are determined on the basis of the evidence produced through their assessment
awarding organisation	A body recognised by the qualifications regulators against the requirements set out in the regulatory arrangements to award credits and qualifications
credit	An award made to an individual in recognition of the achievement of the designated learning outcomes of a unit
credit accumulation	The process of putting together a combination of credits to meet the achievement requirements of a qualification
exemption	The facility for an individual to claim exemption from some of the achievement requirements of a QCF qualification, using evidence of certificated, non-QCF achievement deemed to be of equivalent value
learning outcome	A statement of what an individual can be expected to know, understand or do as a result of a process of learning
monitoring	The review of, and reporting on, an organisation's compliance with the regulatory arrangements by the qualifications regulators

Term	Definition
provider	Normally, an organisation accountable to an awarding organisation for the assessment arrangements leading to the award of credit(s) or qualification(s); in the regulatory arrangements providers are described as 'centre'
qualification	An award made to an individual for the achievement of the specified combination of credits, or credits and exemptions, required for that award
recognition of prior learning (RPL)	A method of assessment that considers whether an individual can demonstrate that they can meet the assessment requirements for a unit through knowledge, understanding or skills they already possess and do not need to develop through a course of learning
rules of combination	A description of the credit accumulation requirements for the achievement of a named qualification
sector skills council	A body responsible for formulating and reviewing occupational standards for a specific sector across the UK, and for supporting the development of units and qualifications based on these standards; each council is an employer-led, independent organisation and is licensed by government
unit	A coherent and explicit set of learning outcomes and assessment criteria, with a title, credit value and level
unit databank	A repository within which all units used in qualifications are stored, classified and made available to users



More information

Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency (England)

53–55 Butts Road
Earlsdon Park
Coventry CV1 3BH
Telephone 0300 303 3011
info@qcda.gov.uk
www.qcda.gov.uk

Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills (Wales)

Qualifications and Learning Division
Castle Buildings
Womanby Street
Cardiff CF10 1SX
Telephone 029 2037 5431
cqfwenquiries@wales.gsi.gov.uk
www.cqfw.net

The Qualifications and Credit Framework will form part of the Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales (CQFW). The CQFW embraces all post-16 and higher education in Wales. Further details can be found at www.cqfw.net.

Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (Northern Ireland)

29 Clarendon Road
Clarendon Dock
Belfast BT1 3BG
Telephone 028 9026 1200
info@ccea.org.uk
www.ccea.org.uk

We want our website and publications to be widely accessible, so please contact QCDA if we're not meeting your needs.

QCDA is developing the QCF with partners as part of a major reform of the vocational qualifications system.

QCDA reference: QCDA/10/4726
ISBN: 978-1-84962-356-8
First published in 2010

This document can be downloaded from the following websites:

www.qcda.gov.uk
www.cqfw.net
www.ccea.org.uk

© Qualifications and Curriculum Authority 2010
© Crown copyright 2010
© Northern Ireland Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment 2010

