

Qualifications
& Credit
Framework

Guidance for developing rules of combination for the Qualifications and Credit Framework

Version 4



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1 Introducing rules of combination

1.1 About this document

This document provides guidance on developing rules of combination for qualifications that will be submitted to the qualification regulators for accreditation in the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF). This guidance supports the *Regulatory arrangements for the Qualifications and Credit Framework* (Ofqual/08/3726) and will be useful to all stakeholders operating in the QCF.

Rules of combination are critical to qualifications as they set out:

- what a learner is required to do to be awarded a QCF qualification
- the potential for learners to transfer credit between different QCF qualifications and different QCF awarding organisations
- exemptions from the credit requirements for QCF qualifications.

It is essential that those developing qualifications understand all of the requirements and possibilities available when developing rules of combination. This guidance explains the features of rules of combination and encourages qualification designers to exploit the features to develop innovative, flexible and fit-for-purpose qualifications that will meet the needs of the sector and facilitate progression, credit accumulation and transfer.

The guidance covers:

- the requirements for rules of combination as set out in the *Regulatory arrangements for the Qualifications and Credit Framework* (Ofqual/08/3726)
- the development of rules of combination in the QCF, including the different ways in which rules of combination have been developed in the QCF so far

- how rules of combination can be used for a range of purposes in the QCF, illustrated by a number of examples of different types of rules of combination.

The guidance should be read alongside the other documents included in version 4 of the *QCF support pack*.

How will the QCF actually work?

A credit-based framework

The QCF has been designed as a unit- and credit-based framework. Underpinning this concept is the principle of credit accumulation and transfer. The purpose of developing the QCF as a unit- and credit-based framework is so that a system of credit accumulation and transfer can be established that operates across the whole framework. The operation of this system of credit accumulation and transfer within a regulated qualifications framework is what makes the QCF unique.

The principle that credits can be transferred between qualifications and awarding organisations in the QCF is one that has been strongly supported in all of the public consultations on the framework. But how will this system actually operate in practice? The answer: through the rules of combination for qualifications.

Rules of combination – the critical connectors between qualifications

The QCF aims to ensure that individual qualifications offer a meaningful, challenging and coherent combination of achievements to learners. Within the QCF, rules of combination establish connections between qualifications.

Credit transfer

The rules of combination format for the QCF is designed to support and encourage the transfer of credits between qualifications. The rules determine the requirements for achievement of the qualification and the conditions under which credits may be transferred between that qualification and others in the QCF. They also determine, through exemptions, the ways in which achievements recognised outside the QCF can count towards qualifications within it.

The rules of combination for a qualification are submitted by an awarding organisation for accreditation by the regulators, often having been approved by a sector skills council (SSC). The scope of credit transfer opportunities within the QCF is determined by the decisions of awarding organisations and often SSCs — supported by the regulators — through the rules of combination established within accredited qualifications.

The rationale for credit accumulation and transfer

Most of the qualifications submitted to the QCF during its initial phase of development have been developed directly from existing qualifications. Awarding organisations, SSCs and the regulators are all working to ensure that this initial transition from the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) to the QCF is completed by December 2010.

Once the initial process of 'populating' the QCF is complete and qualifications are reviewed and submitted for re-accreditation, we can expect rules of combination to become more 'open' and flexible, encouraging and supporting an increasing number of opportunities to transfer credits between qualifications.

The benefits of credit transfer through rules of combination

As the QCF develops, rules of combination will establish more connections between qualifications and people will want to move credits between them. This is based on an assumption that the qualifications system needs to reflect the changes taking place in the lives of people living and working in a prosperous 21st century society.

Our economy is reliant on rapid technical change, continuous improvement of knowledge and skill levels, rapid labour turnover and an increasing use of migrant labour. A qualifications system needs to facilitate movement and change, updating and up-skilling to meet immediate employment needs, while at the same time recognising experiences and expertise over a working lifetime.

Rules of combination in the QCF are not just tools to ensure that each individual qualification in the framework serves a useful purpose, they are also the mechanism through which the overall qualification system itself serves a useful purpose. The rules of combination format for the QCF provides the long-term basis for gradually developing more and more links between different qualifications in response to the demands of a more flexible workforce in a rapidly changing economy.

The guidance in this document is aimed at supporting the gradual process of using the maximum potential of rules of combination to support the aims of the QCF.

1.2 Rules of combination and the QCF

This section sets out the purpose of rules of combination and the requirements for their development in the QCF as described in the *Regulatory arrangements for the Qualifications and Credit Framework* (Ofqual/08/3726).

Rules of combination

- 1.23 Rules of combination specify the credits that need to be achieved, through the completion of particular units, for a qualification to be awarded. All accredited qualifications within the QCF must have a set of rules of combination. These rules must be presented using the standard format, set out in the paragraph below.
- 1.24 The standard format for representing rules of combination within the QCF requires a rationale for the rules of combination to be defined and rules to be established for the accumulation of credits through particular units under the following headings:
- a qualification title: this must record the qualification title for the rules of combination, specified according to the requirements set out in paragraphs 1.18 to 1.22
 - b the credit value of the qualification: this must set out the number of credits required at all levels to achieve the qualification
 - c the credits to be achieved at the level of the qualification or above: this must set out the number of credits that must be achieved at the level of the qualification or above
 - d credits from mandatory units: this must set out any units that must be achieved for the qualification to be awarded
 - e credits from optional units: this must set out any units that a learner may choose from to complete in order to achieve a required number of units or credits towards the award of the qualification; optional units may be clustered into groups and particular combinations of units required or barred in order to structure the choice of units available to learners
 - f credits from other units: this must set out any opportunity to achieve credits from units in the databank by noting the total number of credits that may be achieved through these units and applying any (or none) of the following constraints:
 - i. the level or levels at which these credits must be achieved
 - ii. the subject/sector classification of the units through which credits may be achieved
 - iii. any time constraints on the award of credit that may be counted towards achievement of the qualification
 - g credits from equivalent units: this must set out any opportunities to count credits from a unit/s from other qualifications or from a unit/s submitted by other recognised organisations towards the qualification in place of mandatory or optional unit/s specified in the rules of combination; in order to be accepted as an equivalent, the unit/s must have the same credit value or greater than the mandatory or optional unit(s) in question, and be at the same level or higher
 - h exemptions: this must set out any exemption from the requirement to achieve credit for mandatory, optional or other units that learners can claim, based on certificated achievement outside the QCF deemed to be of equivalent value to a QCF unit or units
 - i time limits on the process of credit accumulation or exemptions: where required, this must set out, for each QCF unit or exemption, any limits on the length of time after an award is gained by a learner that it may still count towards the qualification.

1.25 In establishing rules of combination, qualification developers will use one or more of the headings set out in paragraph 1.24, but there is no requirement to use all of these features. Rules of combination may be based on the achievement of credits from a single unit (through the identification of one mandatory unit).

1.26 Where there is a need to define a pathway that results in an endorsement to the qualification title, requirements for each pathway must be set out separately under each of the headings for rules of combination set out in paragraph 1.24. When submitted together, they form the set of rules of combination for the qualification. All pathways do not have to be of an identical size, but must require learners to achieve a number of credits within the size ranges for Award, Certificate and Diploma set out on page 14. All pathways must set requirements at the same level as detailed in paragraph 1.19.

1.27 The qualifications regulators will make available to all users of the QCF a standard format for rules of combination, based on the format set out in paragraph 1.24. Organisations recognised to develop rules of combination are required to submit them for use in developing qualifications using this format.¹

Qualification title

1.18 Each qualification title submitted for accreditation in the QCF must be presented in a standard format that identifies the level, size and a precise and concise description of the content of the qualification.

1.19 The level of a qualification must be determined by reviewing the rules of combination (see section above) for the qualification and identifying the level at which there is the greatest number of credits required. More than 50 per cent of credits must be at the same level as the qualification or above.

1.20 The size of a qualification must be signalled through the use of the terms 'Award', 'Certificate' and 'Diploma'. This must be determined by the credit value of the qualification (which is established by the rules of combination for the qualification as detailed in paragraph 1.24) as follows:

Title	Award	Certificate	Diploma
Credit value	1 to 12	13 to 36	37+

1.21 In order to indicate a specialist focus within the options for a qualification, it is possible, using rules of combination (see paragraph 1.26), to structure the credits that are required from particular units to identify specific pathways. Where this is the case, it results in an endorsement that reflects the specialist focus of the pathway and supplements the description of the content in the qualification title. This endorsement is represented as a bracketed addition to the title.

1.22 The acronym 'NVQ' may be added as a bracketed addition to the qualification title for certain occupational qualifications. Any qualifications submitted for accreditation that include this acronym must meet the requirements in *Operating rules for using the term NVQ in a QCF qualification title* developed by the qualifications regulators and published separately from this document.²

¹ Regulatory arrangements for the Qualifications and Credit Framework (Ofqual/08/3726), sections 1.23-27

² Regulatory arrangements for the Qualifications and Credit Framework (Ofqual/08/3726), sections 1.18-22

Additional guidance on the titling of qualifications is available from Ofqual in *Guidance on qualification titles within the Qualifications and Credit Framework* (Ofqual/09/4484).

Pathways

Endorsed routes (pathways) that are available to learners within a single qualification should reflect a particular specialism set out through a specific combination of units. As noted above, each specialist route must have a clear relationship with the other routes available in the qualification. This justifies recognising different pathways in the same qualification rather than through separate qualifications. It is not possible to set out in the rules of combination, how similar these pathways must be. For example, the pathways may typically have the same mandatory units, but this may not always be the case.

Where pathways share mandatory units, the specialism is provided by the optional choices available to learners. It may be that different pathways do not contain exactly the same mandatory units, but are still similar enough to be grouped under the same qualification. Therefore, each endorsed route needs to be set out separately under the relevant headings of the format for rules of combination, so that the requirements for each route are clear. These rules, when combined together, make the overall rule for the qualification.

The credit value of the qualification

This must set out the number of credits required at all levels to achieve the qualification.³

The credits to be achieved at the level of the qualification or above

The level of a qualification must be determined by reviewing the rules of combination for the qualification and identifying the level at which there is the greatest number of credits required. More than 50 per cent of credits must be at the same level as the qualification or above.⁴

The number of credits to be achieved at the level of the qualification or above must be listed. More than 50 per cent of credits for the qualification must come from the level of the qualification or above.

This rule may act as an additional requirement, depending on the way in which the rules of combination are specified. In most cases, the rules set out using the 'mandatory', 'optional' or 'other' credits headings will ensure on their own that a learner gains more than 50 per cent of the credit from the level of the qualification or above. In this case, the number entered in the 'web-based accreditation' (WBA) field is purely descriptive of what these other rules require a learner to do. In other cases, the rule is in itself a requirement. This is where the rules that are set out under the 'mandatory', 'optional' or 'other' credits headings do not guarantee that a learner will gain more than 50 per cent of credits from the level of the qualification or above. This means that not only will learners have to achieve the requirements set out under the headings for rules of combination, but they must also ensure that they get the required number of credits from the level of the qualification or above. See section 3.3 (page 20) for an example of what this means in practice.

³ *Regulatory arrangements for the Qualifications and Credit Framework* (Ofqual/08/3726), section 1.24b

⁴ *Regulatory arrangements for the Qualifications and Credit Framework* (Ofqual/08/3726), section 1.19

Credits from mandatory units

This must set out any units that must be achieved for the qualification to be awarded.⁵

Rules of combination do not have to include mandatory units. In some instances the rules of combination for a qualification may specify only optional units and/or credit from other units.

Credits from optional units

This must set out any units that a learner may choose from to complete in order to achieve a required number of units or credits towards the award of the qualification; optional units may be clustered into groups and particular combinations of units required or barred in order to structure the choice of units available to learners.⁶

A qualification does not have to include optional units. In some instances a qualification may specify that all units are mandatory and/or credit from other units.

When presenting the requirements and opportunities available to learners, it will often be necessary to place units together in groups to set out particular requirements for units, credit values or both. It may sometimes be necessary to bar combinations of units either within or between groups because they are too similar to both count towards a qualification. In contrast, it may also be important to require particular combinations of units, for example because it is only when the units are combined together that they make a coherent contribution to the qualification.

Credits from other units

This must set out any opportunity to achieve credits from units in the databank by noting the total number of credits that may be achieved through these units and applying any (or none) of the following constraints:

- i. the level or levels at which these credits must be achieved
- ii. the subject/sector classification of the units through which credits may be achieved
- iii. any time constraints on the award of credit that may be counted towards achievement of the qualification.⁷

Any credits achieved at a higher level than those specified will contribute to the requirements for other credits. For example, if a learner is required to gain a number of credits from level 1, any credits he or she achieves from level 2 may count instead. If a greater number of credits is achieved than required, it is only the required number of credits that will count towards the qualification.

The subject/sector classifications that can be used to restrict the way in which other credits can count towards qualifications are listed in the Annex (page 33). The first or second tier classifications from this list can be used.

⁵ *Regulatory arrangements for the Qualifications and Credit Framework (Ofqual/08/3726)*, section 1.24d

⁶ *Regulatory arrangements for the Qualifications and Credit Framework (Ofqual/08/3726)*, section 1.24e

⁷ *Regulatory arrangements for the Qualifications and Credit Framework (Ofqual/08/3726)*, section 1.24f

Credits from equivalent units

This must set out any opportunities to count credits from a unit/s from other qualifications or from a unit/s submitted by other recognised organisations towards the qualification in place of mandatory or optional unit/s specified in the rules of combination; in order to be accepted as an equivalent, the unit/s must have the same credit value or greater than the mandatory or optional unit/s in question, and be at the same level or higher.⁸

A unit can be equivalent to more than one other unit. Therefore, one larger unit in a qualification may be deemed equivalent to two or more others in the QCF unit databank. Where this is the case, the level of the units in question must be the same as (or higher than) the level of the unit it is being marked as equivalent to in the qualification. In addition, the credit value of the two units combined must be equal to (or greater than) the credit value of the unit in the qualification.

Exemptions

This must set out any exemption from the requirement to achieve credit for mandatory, optional or other units that learners can claim, based on certificated achievement outside the QCF deemed to be of equivalent value to a QCF unit or units.⁹

Shared and owned units within rules of combination

Recognised organisations must identify to whom their units are available and have a rationale for this. When submitting units to the QCF unit databank, they must specify their availability to one of the following:

- a to all awarding organisations to award credit (shared units)
- b restricted to specified awarding organisation/s to award credit (restricted units).¹⁰

When applied, time limits begin on the date the achievements are recorded in a learner's personal learning record and last until the date on which a learner claims a qualification. It is not a requirement that such time limits are set and the default position is that they are not applied.

Time limits on the process of credit accumulation or exemptions

Where required, this must set out, for each QCF unit or exemption, any limits on the length of time after an award is gained by a learner that it may still count towards the qualification.¹¹

⁸ *Regulatory arrangements for the Qualifications and Credit Framework (Ofqual/08/3726)*, section 1.24g

⁹ *Regulatory arrangements for the Qualifications and Credit Framework (Ofqual/08/3726)*, section 1.24h

¹⁰ *Regulatory arrangements for the Qualifications and Credit Framework (Ofqual/08/3726)*, section 1.14

¹¹ *Regulatory arrangements for the Qualifications and Credit Framework (Ofqual/08/3726)*, section 1.24i

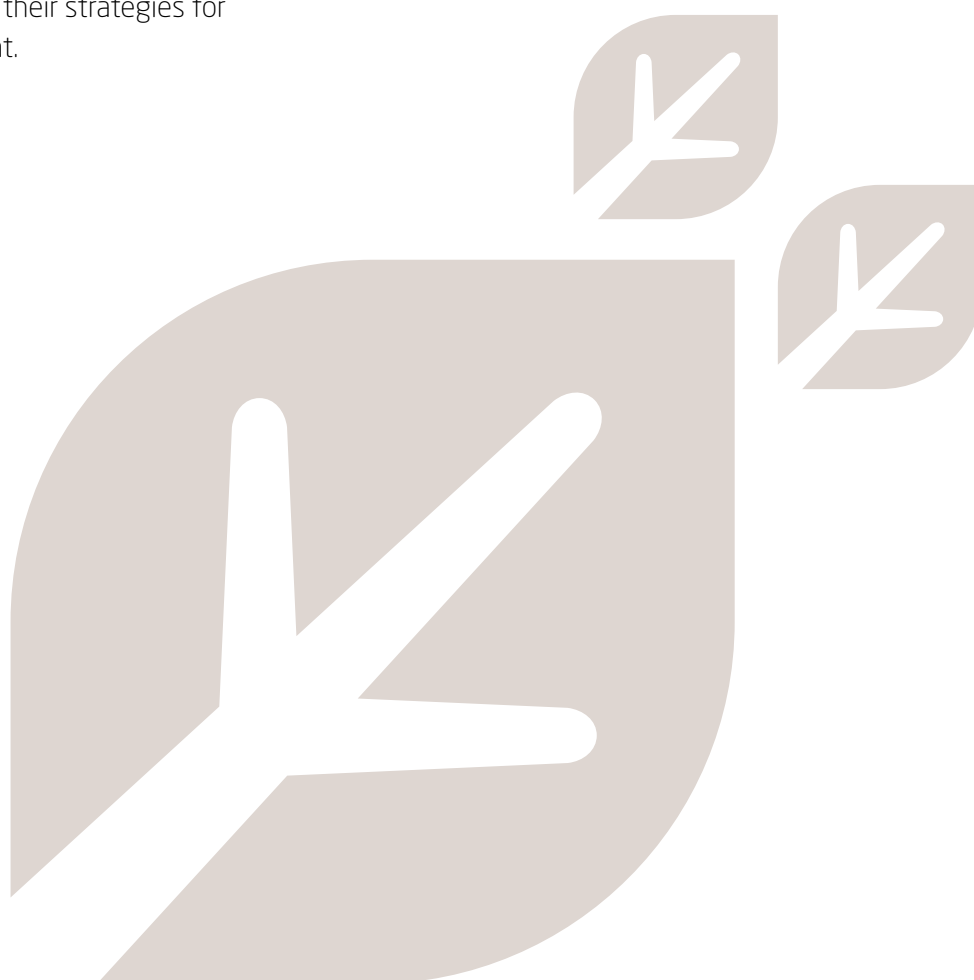
This has implications for rules of combination. Where a qualification is built only from shared units, the rules of combination for that qualification may also be shared across awarding organisations.

Where rules of combination include one or more units that are only available to one awarding organisation, that set of rules will be unique to that awarding organisation. Similarly, where a set of rules includes units restricted to a small group of awarding organisations, those rules will be unique to members of that group. Therefore, availability of shared units to be used in qualifications has an impact on the ability of awarding organisations to share rules of combination.

If a sector organisation wants to make sure that rules of combination are to be shared between different awarding organisations, it has to ensure that all units within such rules are also shared. It follows that SSCs and others involved in the qualifications development process should be mindful of this issue in their strategies for qualifications development.

Within shared rules of combination it is possible for different awarding organisations to offer different subsets of optional units. There is no expectation that all learners will be guaranteed access to all the units identified within these rules through one awarding organisation. In the same way, there is no assumption that a provider has to guarantee access to all units within a set of rules in order to be approved to offer the qualification based on these rules.

Where rules of combination are shared between awarding organisations, the individual qualifications based on these rules of combination may differ between awarding organisations. For example, awarding organisations may develop different assessment arrangements for the same units.



2 The development of rules of combination

2.1 Qualification rationale and rules of combination

There is a variety of purposes behind the design of individual qualifications in the QCF and, consequently, a wide range of different rationales for these qualifications. The regulators make no requirements about how qualification designers use the available features of rules of combination in the QCF to do this.

The rationale for some qualifications may be consistent with a highly prescribed set of rules, while others may logically demand a very open set of rules. The examples in this guidance help to illustrate how this spectrum of different types of rule might be developed to support the rationale for a particular qualification.

In developing rules of combination to reflect the rationale for a qualification, it is important to consider the two purposes that rules of combination have.

- Purpose 1: They have a specific function within each individual qualification to describe the requirements for the award of that qualification.
- Purpose 2: Within the QCF, rules of combination have an additional function, over and above the design of individual qualifications. Each separate set of rules specifies the opportunities and limitations for the transfer of credits and exemptions from other qualifications and awarding organisations. Therefore, they also have a general function across the QCF to enable the operation of a system of credit accumulation and transfer.

Section 3 (page 19) explores the implications of this and the potential to develop a wide range of rules of combination for different purposes in detail, using some practical examples as follows.

- A qualification designed to recognise the achievements made by a learner who undertakes a broad initial introduction to a job role, industry or subject area may have a less tightly defined set of rules of combination to allow for a greater range of options and a wider range of opportunities for credit transfer and exemption.
- A qualification designed to support a specialised role in a highly regulated working environment is likely to have a tightly prescribed set of rules of combination with fewer options, if any.
- A qualification designed to attract new types of employee into a particular area of the workforce (for example older people or migrant workers) may establish significant opportunities for people's previous skills and knowledge to be recognised through flexible rules of combination.

2.2 Developing rules of combination to the QCF format

The *Regulatory arrangements for the Qualifications and Credit Framework* (Ofqual/08/3726) set out a format for rules of combination. The following headings make up the format for the rules of combination:

- qualification title — including endorsed subtitles
- the credit value of the qualification
- the credits to be achieved at the level of the qualification or above
- mandatory units
- optional units
- credits from other units (other credits)
- units with equivalent value
- exemptions.

Time limits for credit accumulation can be noted for any units and time limits may also be specified for exemptions.

Qualification designers should follow a two-stage process when developing rules of combination.

- Stage 1: Qualification designers should develop their rules of combination considering possibilities offered by the format for rules of combination set out in the *Regulatory arrangements for the Qualifications and Credit Framework* (Ofqual/08/3726). As this process normally involves collaboration between organisations, this stage is usually a paper-based exercise.
- Stage 2: Once the rules of combination have been developed, the qualification designers should then consider how their rules of combination are represented and submitted into the WBA system.

Rules of combination may be amended during the period of accreditation for a qualification to reflect the availability of new units. The 'amend' function allows the addition of optional units to an existing group of optional units without having to submit a new qualification for accreditation. All amendments to rules of combination will be subject to approval from the qualifications regulators.

Processes to develop rules of combination

There are three main processes used to develop rules of combination. They are as follows:

1. Consultative process

This process involves seeking feedback from those with an interest in, and knowledge of, the subject matter of the qualification. Some qualification designers may consult widely with employers, learners and deliverers, while others build on existing labour market information and

other research data. It is essential to engage all those who will be involved in agreeing the final rules of combination as early as possible if using a consultative process.

2. Use of technical panels

Another method of bringing together expertise to develop rules of combination is by convening a panel of technical experts. Experts should be selected based on their understanding of qualifications, their knowledge of the subject or sector and their understanding of the needs of those who would be taking the qualifications. In contrast to the consultative process, this process requires the involvement of fewer people as members of the panel are there to represent different perspectives.

3. Development from existing qualification rules

Some qualifications can be developed from existing and successful unit-based provision. In these cases a process to establish how the units should be combined together to form qualifications has already taken place. It is not considered necessary to redefine the rules of combination. However, given the fact that the ability to transfer credit between different qualifications is a new feature of the QCF, it is still necessary to put in place a process to consider and establish opportunities for credit transfer by identifying, within the rules of combination, relevant units from the QCF databank as mandatory, optional, other or equivalent.

It should be noted that the three processes outlined above are not necessarily distinct and that, for example, a group of technical experts may meet to determine the final rules of combination after a consultative process. When agreeing a process to develop rules of combination,

regardless of the organisation that leads the work, the important thing is to ensure that the full range of relevant stakeholders is involved. It is particularly important to ensure that any requirements for establishing the acceptability of the qualification to external agencies (such as sector bodies, industry regulators and professional bodies) are met.

2.3 Common issues to consider in developing rules of combination

Interrogating the QCF unit databank

The first stage in developing rules of combination is to consider all the units available in the QCF unit databank. To do this, it will be necessary for qualification designers to use the search tools to look at the units in the QCF unit databank and ensure that they have taken account of those units already available before developing new ones.

Once all the units required to establish rules of combination are ready (either having been newly developed or re-used from existing ones available in the QCF unit databank), then the rules of combination should be structured using the 'mandatory', 'optional' or 'credits from other units' (referred to as 'other' credits) design features.

This sets out the basic requirements for the award of the qualification through the accumulation of credit and may allow some opportunities for the transfer of credit between qualifications and awarding organisations through the use of shared units or by allowing some credit from other units. The examples in section 3 (page 19) give an idea of the range of possibilities that may be considered when undertaking this activity.

When developing new units, it remains important to consider the rules of combination in which they might be included. In other words, qualification designers must consider how the units will be combined as they develop the units. However, it is only when basic requirements for the award of the qualification have been set that equivalences and exemptions can be fully considered.

Credit from equivalent units

Once this is completed, it is necessary to consider any further opportunities for credit transfer through credit from equivalent units. This involves considering units in the databank that:

- feature in other qualifications
- may not be available to the awarding organisation to award because they are owned by others
- have expired.

Benefits of identifying equivalent units

The identification of equivalent units within QCF rules of combination enables learners to show that they have already achieved part of a qualification through credits awarded towards a different qualification, which may be offered by a different recognised awarding organisation. This helps support the transfer of achievement and reduces the assessment burden.

The identification of equivalence between units, particularly if this occurs across a range of qualifications or sectors, could also provide opportunities for learners to move more freely through the qualifications system and support lifelong learning. Structured arrangements for identifying equivalent units would make this possible.

Guidance for identifying equivalent units

When qualification designers consider whether to identify units as equivalent, it is important that more than the title, level and credit value of the units are taken into account. It is particularly important that learning outcomes and assessment criteria are considered when deciding whether the content of the units is truly equivalent.

As there will never be a perfect fit, qualification designers must reach a judgement on equivalence. Decisions on the closeness of fit will be informed by the purpose of the qualification. In some instances a very close match between learning outcomes will be required; in others a looser connection between learning outcomes may be acceptable. Qualification designers should note that:

- one, two or more units can be identified as equivalent to another unit
- if units have the same title, credit value and level, they should always be identified as equivalent
- a unit can only be identified as equivalent to another unit if it has the same or a higher credit value
- a unit can only be identified as equivalent to another unit if it is at the same level or higher
- there is no requirement to gain agreement on equivalence from the owner of the unit/s identified as equivalent
- there is no obligation for equivalence to be mutual. This means, for example, that if awarding organisation A designates two units owned by awarding organisation B as equivalent to one of its own units, there is no obligation on awarding organisation B to recognise awarding organisation A's unit as equivalent in return

- it is expected that the majority of units identified as equivalent will be equivalent to units specified as 'restricted' or expired units. If a unit is specified as 'shared' then there should be no need to specify a unit that is equivalent to it
- the more units there are in the QCF unit databank, the greater the opportunities to identify equivalence. Qualification designers should therefore periodically review units in the databank to ensure that, as new units become available, they continue to reference the full range of equivalent units within the rules of combination. We suggest that this is done annually, or at a minimum, at the re-accreditation or extension stage for each qualification.

Equivalence with employer-developed units

Employers are becoming more involved in developing and submitting units, either directly or in partnership with awarding organisations. Employers in a particular sector or industry may want units designed specifically to reflect their own training and development needs. These units may be identified as equivalent to units developed for other employer-based training within the same industry.

If awarding organisations work with employers to explore the identification of equivalent units, learners will have more opportunities to transfer achievement. This approach would allow employers to retain control over the content of units relating to their specific needs. At the same time, learners would have more opportunities to transfer their achievements across qualifications and/or awarding organisations.

Using the WBA system to identify equivalent units

Work has recently been completed on the development of the QCF unit management system. This means that the process for identifying units as equivalent on the WBA system is now much easier.

Further guidance on how to identify and record the equivalence of units can be found in the 'help' section of the WBA system.

Those developing qualifications will want to refine their existing process for qualification development to ensure that they are able to undertake this activity and that they periodically review the units that are newly available in the QCF unit databank. This will ensure that, as new units become available, they continue to reference the full range of units appropriate for inclusion in their rules of combination.

Qualification designers will need to consider the widest range of opportunities for credit transfer consistent with the rationale for the qualification. In practice, this requires qualification designers to consider whether there are units that exist in the QCF unit databank, but outside the qualification being developed, that are similar enough to replace those set out already in the rules of combination format.

Unit equivalences are not, in all cases, mutual. For example, it may be that a unit in a specific job-related process may count in place of a more generic introductory unit in a qualification, giving a broad initial introduction to a sector. However, it may not be appropriate for that same introductory unit to count in place of a unit that requires competence to be demonstrated in a specific job role.

There are two points in particular that qualification designers should note when considering equivalences:

- as above, two (or more) units can be considered equivalent to another one
- units with identical titles, with the same credit value or greater and at the same level or higher than a unit within a qualification, are automatically made equivalent by the WBA system.

Exemptions

The exemption facility effectively creates an equivalent value between a unit or units within a QCF qualification and a qualification or certificate outside the QCF.

The regulatory basis for exemption

The requirements and expectations for exemption in the QCF are set out in the *Regulatory arrangements for the Qualifications and Credit Framework* (Ofqual/08/3726). They are based on the following definition of exemption:

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.

This means that learners who have certificated achievements outside of the QCF can claim exemption from units within QCF qualifications that are deemed to be of equal value. Therefore, a learner could achieve a qualification through a combination of credits awarded for units within the QCF and exemption from the requirement to achieve credits for a unit or units based on certificated achievements outside the QCF.

Recognised awarding organisations must have procedures in place to recognise and monitor centres that offer assessment leading to awards within the QCF. These procedures must ensure that each centre has the staff, systems and other resources necessary to support the assessment of units, the award, accumulation and transfer of credits and, where necessary, the recording of exemptions. It is also important that procedures are in place, so that where learner consent is given, a centre can access the learner's previous achievements in their personal learning record to ensure that opportunities for credit transfer and exemption are maximised.

Exemptions can be planned by awarding organisations or individually requested by learners.

Planned exemptions

Qualification developers can plan exemptions by predicting what type of relevant certificated achievements learners who are likely to take a particular qualification might already hold. Where exemption can be predicted and planned, the units to which exemptions apply should be included within the rules of combination of a QCF qualification. Where exemption is granted for a unit or units on the basis of quality-assured certification outside the QCF, and where such units are part of shared rules of combination, the exemption must be recognised by all awarding organisations awarding the unit or units.

Opportunities can be identified through the listing of qualifications and other certificated achievements outside the QCF that are accepted as equivalent in value to a unit or units within the rules of combination for a particular qualification. A qualification may then be achieved through a combination of credits actually awarded and credits exempted on the basis of other certification.

As set out in the *Regulatory arrangements for the Qualifications and Credit Framework*, the qualifications regulators, as part of the awarding organisation recognition process, verify whether awarding organisations have in place the necessary systems, procedures and other resources to ensure claims for exemption are considered and records kept.

Individually requested exemptions

There may be cases where exemptions are requested by learners holding certificated achievements that were not foreseen when the rules of combination were submitted for accreditation. In such instances the awarding organisation and provider should consider requests on an individual basis. To avoid duplication of effort and to ensure that learners do not duplicate learning and undergo unnecessary assessment, such cases should be recorded and the rules of combination should be updated accordingly at the earliest opportunity.

The objective should be a shared record between awarding organisations and SSCs of the exemptions that have been granted. Learners should also be given access to information on exemptions. Accreditation of each individual exemption by the qualifications regulators would delay the exemption process, but qualifications regulators will monitor exemptions once they become part of the rules of combination.



Time limits on exemptions

Time limits can be set for exemptions in the QCF and should be specified when rules of combination are submitted. The length of time that an award may count towards the qualification after it has been gained by the learner should be set out for each QCF unit or exemption. The time limit for each exemption will be considered and agreed by the awarding organisation. The awarding organisation may want to discuss time limits with the relevant SSC.

Credit and exemptions

Learners cannot be awarded credit for exemption because awarding credit for certificated learning outside the QCF would mean awarding credit for achievements twice.

The recording of exemptions

Details of how exemptions will be recorded on certificates will be set out by the qualifications regulators.

Details of how exemptions will be recorded on the personal learning record will be set out by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC).

Exemptions and the NQF

For the vast majority of qualifications developed, one group of qualifications that will be in scope for considering exemptions will be relevant qualifications in the NQF. Qualification designers should consider how units and qualifications achieved in the NQF may count towards qualifications in the QCF. This will be very important in ensuring that learners are not disadvantaged and clearly understand how their existing achievements relate to the new framework while the QCF and NQF both exist, and during any transition from the NQF to the QCF.

Identifying exemptions

When identifying exemptions, those developing rules of combination must have a process for determining how they are assured of the quality of any units or qualifications awarded outside the QCF. Any proposals for exemption within the rules of combination will need to be based on confidence in the quality and rigour of the qualification or certificate for which exemption may be claimed.

It may be that the number of exemptions grows as practice develops in this area, as learners present potential exemptions for awarding organisations to consider and also as those developing rules of combination are able to see the exemptions that others have granted and consider if they can give them too.

Exemption in the QCF is not recognised by the award of credit. When an exemption is granted, the learner is exempt from a particular unit or units within the QCF qualification. This information is held with the awarding organisation. It may, in future, be recorded on the personal learning record.



3 Examples of rules of combination

The remainder of this document shows examples of how particular rules of combination are structured and can be used for different purposes by qualification designers. It is intended to illustrate the potential range of design features that can be accommodated within QCF qualifications and represented within rules of combination.

All of the examples are ‘fictionalised’ to avoid too close an association with a particular sector or awarding organisation. There may be other purposes or rationales for which the example structures (or similar structures) could be appropriate.

The first set of examples (3.1–10) are based on different qualifications, each with a different purpose. Each example shows how a full set of rules of combination might be developed to meet these different purposes.

The remaining examples (3.11–13) focus on how sections of the rules of combination format could be used to represent various design intentions to support different rationales within a qualification. These examples assume that each design feature may be incorporated into a QCF qualification of any size at any level.

3.1 An Award for entry to a particular workforce

This qualification recognises the minimum set of achievements required to enter a particular employment role in a sector. As all entrants to this role are expected to meet these requirements, there are no options within the qualification. This qualification is small and easily achievable.

The qualification is based on the simplest of all possible rules of combination. A single unit is offered to learners and all credits leading to the award of the qualification must be achieved

through this unit. The rules of combination for the qualification are presented as follows.

Qualification title:

Level 2 Award in working with the elderly

Credit value: 6

Minimum credit to be achieved at, or above, the level of the qualification: 6

Mandatory units (credit value 6)

Title	Credits	Level
Working with the elderly	6	2

Note

A qualification in the QCF can be made up of a single unit.

3.2 An Award to meet new employment requirements

This qualification is designed for people already employed in a workforce, but who are expected to meet new requirements for employment as a result of recent legislation and a subsequent revision of occupational standards.

As the qualification reflects legislative requirements, it offers no options within it. However, as the new employment requirements cover several different areas of responsibility, these are reflected in separate units.

This separation into different units also enables training programmes to be developed around the individual units, permitting employees to accumulate credits over time to meet the new requirements within a specified period.

Qualification title:

Level 3 Award in financial planning

Credit value: 12**Minimum credit to be achieved at, or above, the level of the qualification:** 12**Mandatory units (credit value 12)**

Title	Credits	Level
The Financial Planning Act 2007	3	3
Confidentiality and client privilege	3	3
Access to financial advice	3	3
Equality, diversity and financial literacy	3	3

Note

Like the first example, the only part of the rules of combination format used here is the 'mandatory units' section.

3.3 An Award to support recruitment into a particular workforce

In this example, the qualification strategy developed by an SSC has identified a need to improve recruitment into routine employment in the sector. This is to counteract long-term competition for new employees from other related sectors and support the planned expansion of employment in the sector over time.

In response to this need, the SSC worked with awarding organisations to develop an introductory qualification designed to give new employees a simple introduction to the work of the sector, together with the opportunity to sample some of the many types of initial employment role offered in that sector.

The intention is that credits earned in the 'mandatory units' and 'optional units' could be carried forward into a more specialised level 3 Certificate that would recognise the full range of skills and knowledge required for this more specialised employment role.

Qualification title:

Level 2 Award in health and fitness

Credit value: 12**Minimum credit to be achieved at, or above, the level of the qualification:** 9**Mandatory units (credit value 6)**

Title	Credits	Level
Health and safety in sports and fitness activities	6	2

Optional units (credit value 6)

Title	Credits	Level
Maintenance of sports equipment	3	2
Badminton for beginners	3	1
An introduction to nutrition for sports fitness	3	2
Setting up a training circuit	3	2
Life-saving for beginners	3	2
Basic telephone skills	3	1

Note

The availability of numerous optional units in the qualification offers a new employee the opportunity to continue to sample different employment options before selecting an appropriate area of specialism.

A learner may exceed the requirements for the qualification and so open up options to carry forward credits to a more specialised qualification in the future. All credits achieved through optional units will be recorded by the awarding organisation.

This example demonstrates the significance of the section of the QCF format that sets out the 'Minimum credit to be achieved at, or above, the level of the qualification'. In this example, without 9 credits being required here, the learner would be able to accumulate the necessary 12 credits to complete the qualification from the two optional units at level 1 (with a combined credit value of 6) and the single 6-credit mandatory unit at level 2. In this case, it would mean that a learner would be able to achieve a level 2 qualification with 50 per cent of credit at level 1. This would mean that the rules of combination set out did not meet one of the QCF specification requirements.¹² It is only because the 'minimum credits' section sets an additional requirement that this rule is acceptable in the QCF.

If, instead, this example included only one optional unit at level 1, it would not be possible to achieve the qualification without achieving more than 50 per cent of the credit at the level of the qualification or above. In this case, this section would not be so significant and simply describe the requirements set out by the 'mandatory', 'optional' or 'other units' sections rather than set an additional requirement.

Those developing qualifications should be mindful of this distinction. If they decide to use the 'Minimum credit to be achieved at, or above, the level of the qualification' section as an additional requirement, there will be a need to develop a clear mechanism for communicating this extra requirement to learners undertaking a qualification.

3.4 A Certificate to bring together two related qualifications that are currently separate

The qualification in this example has been developed in response to the particular strategy of an SSC for qualifications development in its sector. Here, two separate qualifications in the NQF have been reviewed and brought together within a single qualification in the QCF. This has several advantages:

- it increases flexibility in the workforce by creating a deliberate overlapping of two different employment roles, making movement between them more straightforward for people working in the sector
- it makes the process of development and accreditation less bureaucratic for both the awarding organisations involved and the regulators
- it increases the potential size of the cohort working towards the qualification, creating more viable programme numbers for providers and reducing the costs of delivering programmes leading to the qualification
- it offers the opportunity for people to become qualified in both specialisms without having to complete two separate qualifications.

The two existing qualification titles are both reflected in the endorsed subtitles for each pathway within the qualification. Although the example shown has just two pathways, there is no reason why this same principle could not be applied to three or more pathways within a single qualification.

¹² This may include certificated achievements in the NQF or outside of the NQF.

Qualification title:

Level 4 Certificate in careers advice

Pathway 1:Level 4 Certificate in careers advice
(young people)**Pathway 2:**

Level 4 Certificate in careers advice (adults)

Credit value (pathway 1): 24 credits**Credit value (pathway 2):** 21 credits**Minimum credit to be achieved at, or above, the level of the qualification:** 18**Mandatory units for both pathways (credit value 18)**

Title	Credits	Level
Careers advice and guidance	6	4
The role of the careers service in education and training	6	4
Communications skills for careers advice workers	6	4

Optional units for pathway 1 (credit value 6)

Title	Credits	Level
Using technology to support careers advice	3	3
14–19 Diplomas	3	3
Using labour market intelligence	3	4
Confidentiality and client privilege	3	3
Supporting work experience for young people	3	3

Optional units for pathway 2 (credit value 3)

Title	Credits	Level
Using technology to support careers advice	3	3
Using labour market intelligence	3	4
Confidentiality and client privilege	3	3
How adults learn	3	4

Note

The two pathways, though both falling within the credit value range of a Certificate, do not have identical credit values — this is a flexible feature of the QCF. The credit value of the qualification is the same as the pathway with the fewest credits. In the example, the mandatory units have only been listed once as they are the same for both pathways. If the mandatory units were to differ by pathway, they would need to be listed separately to reflect this.

If a learner were to complete more than one pathway in a qualification, both would be recognised and recorded by the awarding organisation.

3.5 A Certificate for a range of initial employment roles in a sector

This qualification has been developed in response to a particular feature of an SSC qualifications strategy, which found that people entering the sector workforce in low-skilled jobs were given very few opportunities for formal training and tended to remain stuck in a particular employment role for many years. As part of the drive to improve skill levels across its workforce, the SSC worked with awarding organisations to develop an initial qualification to address these issues.

As the workforce is extremely varied and draws people from a wide range of other non-skilled or semi-skilled work roles, the qualification is designed to encourage people to develop initial skills in a wide range of employment roles and recognise the value of recent skills acquisition in other areas not directly related to employment in the sector.

To establish a culture of training and development in a workforce that has not traditionally offered training to low-skilled workers, the qualification is designed to encourage the process of credit accumulation over time during an initial period of employment in the sector. The target for achievement of the qualification is challenging for people at this level, but a wide variety of routes to achievement of the qualification is made available to build confidence and encourage progression to further qualifications.

No mandatory units are required for achievement of the qualification. This qualification requires credits from the 'optional units' and 'credits from other units' sections of the rules of combination format. However, given that the rule set here requires credits from the same sector/subject area as the optional units, there is nothing to stop a learner gaining all the credits from the listed optional units.

Some of the optional units enable achievement to be recognised above the level of the qualification. This anticipates that people in routine jobs in the sector may be required to perform challenging tasks as part of their role, or are looking for opportunities to progress to more skilled employment.

Qualification title: Level 1

Certificate in residential care

Credit value: 24

Minimum credit to be achieved at, or above, the level of the qualification: 18

Optional units (credit value 18)

Title	Credits	Level
Working with older people	3	1
Working with young children (0–5)	3	1
Working with teenagers	3	1
Working with disabled children	3	1
Working with disabled adults	3	1
Working with the mentally ill	3	1
Health and hygiene in a residential setting	3	1
Safety and security in a residential setting	3	1
Dealing with complaints	3	2
Dealing with challenging behaviour	3	2
Simple restraint techniques	3	1
Safe lifting techniques	3	1

Credits from other units (credit value 6)

6 credits at Entry level 3 that have been achieved within three years of award of the qualification may be counted towards the qualification.

Note

It is assumed that more units could be added to the optional list over time, allowing new skills areas to be recognised.

3.6 A Certificate to recognise related but specialised employment roles within a sector

This qualification has been developed in response to demand within a particular sector for a designated area of specialism to be identified in the title of the qualification, while at the same time fulfilling the general requirements for employment in the sector that are underpinned by relevant occupational standards.

The specialism is once again identified through an endorsed subtitle linked to a particular pathway. In this example, a number of pathways are identified, each one linked to a small number of optional units, designed to similar specifications, that identify the specialist area.

This particular structure establishes a baseline of mutual confidence across employers in the sector that people with very different specialist skills will all have a common basis of skills and knowledge in the essential requirements of the employment role. This will again support labour mobility and job flexibility.

It also means that once the initial qualification has been achieved, the focus of training and development in the sector can focus solely on the specialist training that is easy to learn on the job and can be assessed within the workplace.

Individuals working in the sector will know that concentration on a particular specialism will not prevent them moving into other specialist areas. They will also be able to complete the requirements of different pathways within the qualification as they move between different specialist areas in their career.

Qualification title:

Level 3 Certificate in professional cooking (specialist pathway)

Specialist pathways:

(English) (French) (Italian) (Spanish) (Chinese) (Indian) (Thai) (North African) (Turkish) (Greek)

Credit value of each pathway: 36 credits

Minimum credit to be achieved at, or above, the level of the qualification: 24

Mandatory units (credit value 27)

Title	Credits	Level
Health and safety in the kitchen	3	2
Safe food handling	3	2
Personal hygiene in the kitchen	3	2
Cutting, chopping and slicing techniques	3	2
Menu planning	3	3
The chemistry of cooking	3	3
Roasting and baking techniques	3	3
Frying and grilling techniques	3	3
Boiling and poaching techniques	3	3



Qualification title:

Level 3 Certificate in professional cooking (specialist pathway) (continued)

Optional units for pathway specialism: (Indian) credit value 9

Title	Credits	Level
The history and ingredients of Indian cookery	3	3
The techniques of Indian cookery	3	3
Preparing an Indian meal	3	3

Optional units for pathway specialism: (Spanish) credit value 9

Title	Credits	Level
The history and ingredients of Spanish cookery	3	3
The techniques of Spanish cookery	3	3
Preparing a Spanish meal	3	3

and so on for each additional pathway

Note

This particular structure has benefits for small employers in specialist areas, where the cost of training staff to achieve a full qualification is too expensive, but the benefits of training to meet the specialist requirements of a current job role are clear. In the example, the mandatory units have only been listed once as they are the same for all pathways. If the mandatory units were to differ by pathway, they would need to be listed separately to reflect this.

3.7 A Diploma to offer a licence to practise in a highly regulated industry

Previous examples of 'tightly defined' rules of combination have focused on relatively small qualifications. However, there is no necessary correlation between the credit value of a qualification and the characteristics of its rules of combination. In this example, a substantial qualification is based on highly prescribed rules of combination as these are consistent with the rationale for the qualification.

Note, however, that even in this qualification, there is an opportunity (though restricted) to include credits within the qualification from other units. The qualification designers have chosen not to list these as 'optional units', but to specify the levels, timescales and subject/sector classification code from which these units must be drawn.

All units developed within the particular requirements of the 'credit from other units' section of the rules of combination will automatically become available to learners once they are placed in the QCF unit databank. This will enable the qualification to be continuously updated in response to changing technologies without needing to update a list of optional units.

Qualification title:

Level 5 Diploma in power supply maintenance

Credit value: 60**Minimum credit to be achieved at, or above, the level of the qualification:** 48**Mandatory units (credit value 54)**

Title	Credits	Level
The power supply industry	12	5
Principles of power supply maintenance	12	5
Health and safety in the power supply industry	6	4
Hazard identification in power supply	6	5
Risk assessment approaches to power supply	6	5
Emergency power restoration strategies	6	5
Roles and responsibilities of maintenance workers in the power supply industry	6	5

Credit from other units (credit value 6)

6 credits at level 4 awarded a maximum of two years prior to award of the qualification in subject/sector classification area 04.2: manufacturing technologies.

3.8 A Diploma to support a programme of continuing professional development

This qualification has been developed to support a long-term programme of continuing professional development in a sector where a wide range of specialist training is offered and where there is a general requirement from a professional association to maintain continuous updating of skills and knowledge, but without prescribing the content of the qualification beyond a single mandatory unit.

The rules of combination aim to stimulate a breadth of interest in professional development by grouping units under three broad headings and requiring credits to be gained from each of these three groupings.

The qualification has very open rules about the levels at which credit might be achieved. This is consistent with the rationale for the qualification, encouraging people to develop skills and knowledge in new areas of learning.

The freedom that learners have to combine units across different levels means that those undertaking this qualification will need to be aware of the fact that a minimum of 48 credits are required to be achieved at the level of the qualification or above. Their options must be carefully chosen to ensure that this requirement is met, as the rules set out through 'mandatory', 'optional' and 'other' credits do not guarantee a combination of units that will meet this requirement on their own. This issue also arises in example 3.3.



Qualification title:

Level 6 Diploma in management studies

Credit value: 72**Minimum credit to be achieved at, or above, the level of the qualification:** 48**Mandatory units (credit value 12)**

Title	Credits	Level
Effective learning and research techniques	12	6

A minimum of 60 credits must be achieved from optional groups 1, 2 and 3 together, with at least 12 credits achieved from each optional group.

Optional group 1: Managing people (credit value 12)

Title	Credits	Level
Charismatic leadership techniques	6	5
Managing recruitment	6	6
Electronic management techniques	6	6
Managing failure	6	6

Optional group 2: Managing organisations (credit value 12)

Title	Credits	Level
Managing a lean organisation	12	6
Managing mergers	12	6
Leadership by example	6	5
Managing downturn	6	6

Qualification title:

Level 6 Diploma in management studies (continued)

Optional group 3: The management environment (credit value 12)

Title	Credits	Level
Responding to climate change	6	5
Understanding exchange rate movements	6	6
Hedge funds and your business	6	6
Bank failure: The example of Northern Rock	6	5

Note

By predetermining a limited range of permitted credit values for units in the unit development phase, the process of accumulating credits towards the qualification requirement is made more straightforward for learners.

In this example, the requirements made for the optional groups are easily achievable by adding together different units. Where the units all have a wide range of different values, it is sometimes difficult for learners to achieve the required credits without actually achieving more credits than required. Ensuring that the units in a group can be easily combined together to meet the set requirements makes it much clearer for learners to work out what they need to achieve.

This example also includes another possibility in structuring the credits required from different optional groups. It is possible to express the number of credits required from optional units as a whole and then some further requirements about credits required from individual groups.

The advantage of structuring things in such a way is that learners are required to get a minimum number of credits from options and from particular groups, but have some flexibility about the way in which the overall requirements for options are met.

3.9 An Award to offer progression to further qualifications for learners with learning difficulties

This qualification is designed to be extremely flexible for learners. The main objective of the qualification is to give learners the confidence to progress to further learning at level 1. The subject matter of the qualification is irrelevant to this objective and so the rules of combination for the Award permit a wide range of achievements to count towards achievement of the qualification.

At the same time, the qualification aims to encourage learners to take responsibility for their own learning and support them in making informed choices about appropriate progression opportunities. The mandatory units of the qualification provide the organisational structure within which the learners reflect on their current learning experiences and plan for future learning.

The qualification is small enough to be able to provide a useful platform for learners who are able to make rapid progress towards a level 1 qualification. At the same time, the facility to achieve credits above and beyond the requirements of the rules of combination offer a structure within which a more substantial programme can be developed to meet the needs of learners who may need more support in progressing to level 1 achievements.

Qualification title:

Entry level 3 Award in learning skills

Credit value: 10

Minimum credit to be achieved at, or above, the level of the qualification: 6

Mandatory units (credit value 6)

Title	Credits	Level
Making choices	3	Entry 3
Learning to learn	3	Entry 3

Credits from other units (credit value 4)

4 credits at Entry level 2

Note

In this example, learners can gain four credits from Entry level 2. This does not mean that the credits must be from Entry level 2, rather that they may be from Entry level 2, Entry level 3 or any level above it. In theory, the qualification offers a huge range of units to learners. In practice, a centre will determine which units it is able to offer, perhaps through the awarding organisation offering the qualification.

3.10 Encouraging workforce flexibility through credit transfer within a sector

Where an SSC identifies the need for increased labour mobility within a sector through its sector qualifications strategy, the rules of combination for the QCF can be used to support and promote this flexibility within the sector workforce. The opportunities for credit transfer within the rules of combination format offer an effective tool for promoting this flexibility.

The 'credits from equivalent units' section of the standard format will be particularly useful in promoting workforce flexibility in a context where

different awarding organisations offer qualifications in particular subsectors, and where there is no general agreement on sharing units across the sector.

As set out in section 1, in identifying ‘credits from equivalent units’, within the rules of combination for a qualification an awarding organisation can set out its willingness to accept credits transferred from another awarding organisation. Therefore, QCF rules of combination permit the identification of units with an equivalent value to those offered in the qualification, even where these units are not identical.

As each new qualification is accredited within the QCF, it offers the opportunity for the awarding organisation submitting the qualification to build, within the rules of combination for the qualification, the widest possible range of opportunities for ‘credits from equivalent units’ to be identified within the QCF unit databank and included within the rules of combination for the qualification. Clearly, the more units in the databank, the greater the opportunities to identify equivalence in credit values and so the ability of the QCF to support labour mobility and flexibility will grow over time. In this example, as part of the rationale for the qualification is about increasing workforce flexibility, it may be possible to identify a greater range of equivalences than would be possible for a qualification designed to recognise a very specific set of skills.

SSCs wishing to support labour mobility within their sector could use their processes for ‘approval of’ qualification submissions to check whether the qualification designer has considered the identification of appropriate opportunities for credit transfer through the ‘units with equivalent value’ section of the rules of combination.

The following example may be reproduced for any unit listed in the rules of combination for a qualification. In other words, ‘credit equivalence’

may be identified for both mandatory and optional units within a qualification. It is assumed that each unit in the following example is ‘owned’ by a different awarding organisation.

Units with equivalent value

Title	Credits	Level
How to tune a guitar	3	3

Credits from any of the following units are equivalent:

Title	Credits	Level
Banjo-tuning techniques	3	3
How to tune a mandolin	6	3
Tuning a dulcimer	3	4

Note

The operation of the personal learning record will support the recognition of these equivalences, both when learners look at their potential routes to achievement and in providing awarding organisations with the information necessary to conduct the process of awarding qualifications.

As discussed in section 2, there is no obligation on the awarding organisations offering any of the equivalent units to recognise any of the other units as equivalent, although an SSC might insist that they do so as a condition for ‘approval of’ a qualification submission.

Although this example focuses on workforce flexibility within a sector, there is no reason why opportunities for credit transfer through equivalent units should be limited to a sector. The same facility could be used to encourage labour mobility across sector boundaries and some SSCs are already identifying the need to recruit from the existing workforce outside their sector to address future skill shortages.

3.11 Addressing labour shortages by encouraging recruitment from 'neighbouring' sectors through exemption

Another feature of rules of combination that can be used to encourage movement both within and between sectors is the use of exemptions based on non-QCF qualifications or certification. The term 'exemption' is used because through this facility learners can be exempted from the requirement to achieve credit/s within the QCF rules of combination for a particular qualification.

The following example assumes that exemption might be claimed from a particular component of a QCF qualification, based on alternative qualifications from outside of the QCF, but covering a similar area of achievement.

Exemptions

Title	Credits	Level
Youth work	3	2

Exemption from the credit achievement requirements for this unit may be claimed on the basis of one of the following qualifications:

Intermediate Certificate in community development

Introductory Certificate in youth club management

Certificate in working with children

Note

All exemption arrangements must relate to a whole unit or units. It is not possible within the QCF to claim exemption from only some of the achievement requirements of a unit.

3.12 Encouraging employer-based training to contribute to qualifications through credit accumulation

In some instances, it may be that employer-based provision leads to the development of new rules of combination and qualifications. In this instance, the guidance and examples in this document may be used in their development. One possible way of encouraging employers to contribute to the development of QCF qualifications would be to invite employers to develop units based on their customised training programmes and to build these into existing developments of rules of combination.

This would be appropriate providing there were existing qualifications relevant to the outcomes of the employer-based training. In this case, credits could be awarded to employees achieving within employer programmes and contribute to such rules of combination for qualifications.

This could be done by adding newly developed units to the 'optional units' in the rules of combination, or allowing them to count through the 'credit from other units' or 'units with equivalent value' section (where credits are awarded by another awarding organisation or where the units are not normally offered as part of this type of qualification). This example assumes the latter case will be less common, as awarding organisations build relationships with employers to bring their provision within the QCF.

The following example shows two ways that this may be done. The units may be added to the 'optional units' section, as shown. However, they could also feature in the 'credit from other units' section of the rules of combination. This would effectively offer awarding organisations a controlled space within a qualification in which a potentially large range of employer units could be offered.

Using the 'other' credits facility would allow awarding organisations to work with employers to develop units in specialised areas continuously during the lifetime of the qualification without having to update the rules of combination. The opportunities to count credit through this part of the rules of combination may be limited for each individual learner by the units to which he or she has access through the employer. However, the number and range of units that may count through this facility is potentially very large.

The origins of the units available through this section of the qualification will not be flagged within the QCF unit databank itself. It would be for the awarding organisation concerned to work with an employer to ensure that the employer understands this process and is clear about which units its employees should undertake as part of the qualification.

Qualification title:

Level 3 Certificate in production techniques

Credit value: 30

Minimum credit to be achieved at, or above, the level of the qualification: 30

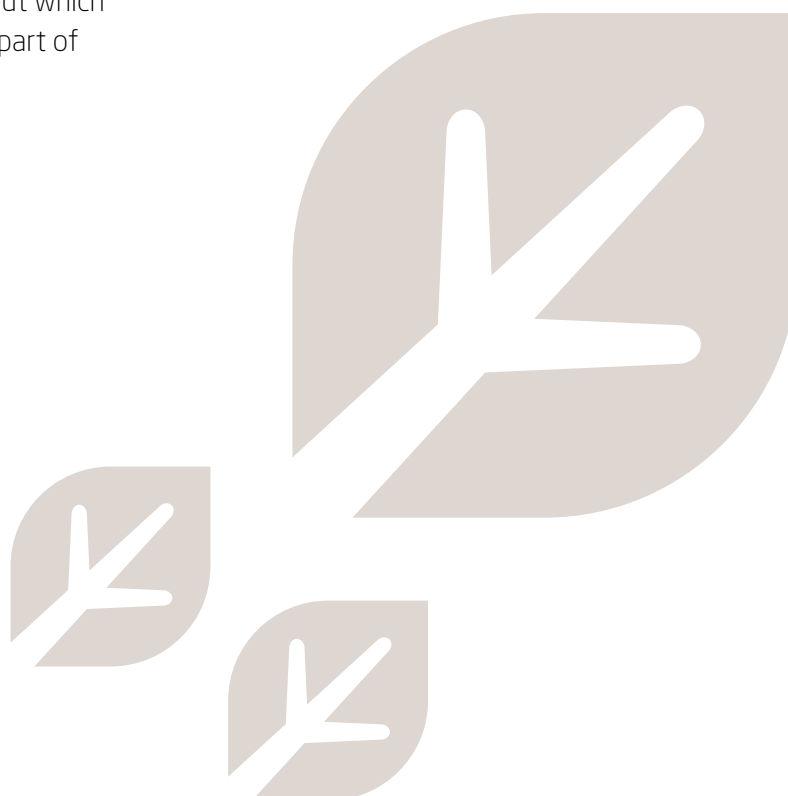
Mandatory units (credit value 15)

A collection of mandatory units leading to 15 credits at level 3

Optional units

A minimum of 15 credits must be achieved through optional units (a collection of optional units, including additional optional units submitted by an employer)

OR (depending on the approach taken)
15 credits in the relevant sector/subject area to that employer



3.13 Supporting international labour mobility through exemptions

In this example, the rules of combination for a qualification are used to support one of the strategic aims of an SSC — to upgrade the skills of the increasing proportion of migrant workers in the workforce. This is done through developing the exemption facility within the rules of combination.

The principle behind this aspect of the rules of combination is simple — that people with a recognised qualification from another country should be able to count relevant aspects of that qualification against identified units at particular levels of the QCF. The exemption mechanism could also be used to recognise employer training that sits outside of the QCF.

The following example illustrates the potential of the rules of combination format in the QCF to support sensitive judgements about the relevance of overseas qualifications to the particular requirements of the UK workforce. Three examples of exemption facilities are illustrated, using (invented) qualifications from three different countries. Each qualification offers the opportunity to claim exemption from different patterns of credit achievement within the rules of combination.

Exemptions

Title	Credits	Level
Pipe-cutting techniques	3	2
Pipe-bending techniques	3	2

Exemption from the credit achievement requirements of these units may be claimed on the basis of a Certificate in plumbing techniques issued by the Latvian National Council of Chambers of Commerce.

Exemptions (continued)

Title	Credits	Level
Pipe-cutting techniques	3	2
Pipe-bending techniques	3	2
Screw-fitting applications	3	2
Pressure-fitting applications	3	2

Exemption from the credit achievement requirements of these units may be claimed on the basis of an Intermediate Diploma in plumbing and heating accredited by the Ministry of Work and Enterprise, France.

Title	Credits	Level
Pipe-cutting techniques	3	2
Pipe-bending techniques	3	2
Screw-fitting applications	3	2
Pressure-fitting applications	3	2
Boiler maintenance (electric)	6	2
Boiler maintenance (gas)	6	2

Exemption from the credit achievement requirements of these units may be claimed on the basis of a Certificate of competence in central heating issued by the Council of Industry and Commerce, Poland.

Note

New arrangements for exemption could be added, perhaps through structured dialogue with the relevant accreditation bodies in each country with a support programme for migrant workers.

Annex: 15 subject/sector areas with indicative content

Area	First tier	Area	Second tier
1.	Health, public services and care	1.1	Medicine and dentistry
		1.2	Nursing and subjects and vocations allied to medicine
		1.3	Health and social care
		1.4	Public services
		1.5	Child development and wellbeing
2.	Science and mathematics	2.1	Science
		2.2	Mathematics and statistics
3.	Agriculture, horticulture and animal care	3.1	Agriculture animal care
		3.2	Horticulture and forestry
		3.3	Animal care and veterinary science
		3.4	Environmental conservation
4.	Engineering and manufacturing	4.1	Engineering technologies
		4.2	Manufacturing technologies
		4.3	Transportation operations and maintenance
5.	Construction, planning and the built environment	5.1	Architecture and the built environment
		5.2	Building and construction
		5.3	Urban, rural and regional planning
6.	Information and communication	6.1	ICT practitioners technology
		6.2	ICT for users
7.	Retail and commercial enterprise	7.1	Retailing and wholesaling
		7.2	Warehousing and distribution
		7.3	Service enterprises
		7.4	Hospitality and catering
8.	Leisure, travel and tourism	8.1	Sport, leisure and recreation
		8.2	Travel and tourism

Area	First tier	Area	Second tier
9.	Arts, media and publishing	9.1	Performing arts
		9.2	Crafts, creative arts and design
		9.3	Media and communication
		9.4	Publishing and information services
10.	History, philosophy and theology	10.1	History
		10.2	Archaeology and archaeological sciences
		10.3	Philosophy
		10.4	Theology and religious studies
11.	Social sciences	11.1	Geography
		11.2	Sociology and social policy
		11.3	Politics
		11.4	Economics
		11.5	Anthropology
12.	Languages, literature and culture	12.1	Languages, literature and culture of the British Isles
		12.2	Other languages, literature and culture
		12.3	Linguistics
13.	Education and training	13.1	Teaching and lecturing
		13.2	Direct learning support
14.	Preparation for life and work	14.1	Foundations for learning and life
		14.2	Preparation for work
15.	Business, administration and law	15.1	Accounting and finance
		15.2	Administration
		15.3	Business management
		15.4	Marketing and sales
		15.5	Law and legal services

More information

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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.

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