

# **Discourse, practice and power in adult learning reform in England and Wales, 2000-2014**

**A project submitted to  
Middlesex University in  
partial fulfilment of the  
requirements for the degree  
of Doctor of Professional Studies**

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**February 2016**

*The views expressed in this research project are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the supervisory team, Middlesex University, or the examiners of this work.*

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## Acknowledgements

I would like to say thank you to many people for supporting and advising me along the way. Thanks to Darryll Bravenboer for his clear advice, support and confidence in my abilities throughout and to Ruth Miller for pointing me in the right direction at the outset. Thanks to official and unofficial critical readers - Angelo Varetto, Jacqui Mutter, Gabriele Stöger, Ove Svensson, Jörgen Bergwall and my colleague Carole Stott. Thanks especially to Nick Hewlett and to my sister Theresa, whose encouragement and advice throughout was so invaluable. Thanks to Francesca Lillis for periodically telling me to get on with it, to Jack Lillis for those long Skypes on Foucault, to Jean Lillis for saying you *will* get there Fin and to Patsy Hughes for smoothing the way. Thanks to Fred Smithies, my great teacher and guide at St Mary's Secondary Modern School, who will be delighted to be proved right, yet again.

## Abstract

This analysis of the exercise of power in and behind some of the important discourses in adult learning reform in England and Wales, 2000-2014, examines how the early narrowing of the concept of what constituted (publicly funded) lifelong learning – controlled through increasing centralisation of adult learning reform discourses - was to affect the conduct and course of described adult learning reforms, through the exercise of centripetal government power - and outlines some implications for current adult learning reform discourses.

The author adapts an approach outlined in 'Technologies of Truth' (Heikinenn, et al. 2012) to reveal one distilled 'catalogue of possibilities' from 'KPS' analyses of 'Knowledge', 'Power' and 'Subject' relations, within the discourse of each 'Public Work' report recontextualised for this doctoral study; analyses the operation of (individual and institutional) subjects within those discourses and how discursal subjects were constituted; calls on Foucault and Fairclough's thinking and approaches to discourse analysis and on Blommaert's work on 'scales' (Blommaert 2006), 'indexicality', 'stratification' and 'text and context' (Blommaert 2005) to further subject the results of KPS analysis to detailed questions concerning the discourses and their control.

'KPS' analysis shows repeated, observable patterns of discursal control: Government (and those in its orbit), constrained the adult learning reform discourses described, "centering" control over each discourse, narrowly circumscribing and stratifying lifelong learning and who should be publicly funded to pursue it; with contrasting government positions and approaches to establishing qualifications frameworks in Wales and England.

What does this analysis mean for understanding how discourse in adult learning reform is controlled now? The author suggests (at least) a detailed analysis of recent and current discourses associated with Apprenticeships in England, scrutiny of key texts and guidance documents, further adapting the (Heikinenn, et al. 1999) approach, using 'linguistic technique to answer social-scientific questions' (Blommaert 2005: 237).

# Contents

## Context statement

Chapter 1	Introduction	6
Chapter 2	Squinting through a Foucauldian prism	20
Chapter 3	The exercise of government power in controlling described adult learning reform discourses	31
Chapter 4	The Rewards of Recognition: the value of NOCN Accreditation, Quality Assurance and Development for Non-Accredited Learning, NIACE 2003	41
Chapter 5	Learning from experience – implementing credit: A Comparative Analysis of Awarding Body Credit Practice within the Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales. Federation of Awarding Bodies, 2005.	58
Chapter 6	Final report on the support and capacity building programme for UK Sector Skills Councils and Standard Setting Bodies, for the development of units and qualifications as part of the VQ reform programme (including QCF) and the alignment of priority qualifications with public funding. Credit Works, 2009.	66
Chapter 7	New routes into university for people working in adult social care. Skills for Care, 2013	77
Chapter 8	Cataloguing the possibilities: imagination and creativity inside the constraints of Public Work discourses	88
References		94
<b>Appendix: Public Works</b>		<b>103</b>

*The Rewards of Recognition: the value of NOCN Accreditation, Quality Assurance and Development for Non-Accredited Learning. (NIACE 2003).*

*Learning from experience – implementing credit: A Comparative Analysis of Awarding Body Credit Practice within the Credit and Qualification Framework for Wales. (Federation of Awarding Bodies 2005)*

*Getting the best from the QCF: Final report on the support and capacity building programme for UK Sector Skills Councils and Standard Setting Bodies, for the development of units and qualifications as part of the VQ reform programme (including QCF) and the alignment of priority qualifications with public funding. (Learning and Skills Council 2009)*

*New routes into university for people working in adult social care. (Skills for Care 2013)*

## Chapter 1 Introduction

### 1.1 Situating my professional practice

I have worked in adult learning since 1980, respectively as a teacher, a community worker, a development officer for a regional Open College Network and the National Open College Network. For the last eleven years, I have co-directed a consultancy - Credit Works - working on nationally commissioned research and implementation projects in the field of adult learning, usually involving the operation and application of credit systems.

For ten years from the mid 1980s, I worked for organisations operating outside the publicly funded adult learning system, outside what I and my peers then regarded as mainstream education. I arrived in 1985 at a new 'Centre Against Unemployment' (Ward, Taylor 1986), as a qualified teacher of adults, with a background in teaching 'English for Specific Purposes' (Dudley-Evans 1998), home from working for an oil company in the Arabian Gulf. Working at the Centre, I became interested in education that blurred lines between the 'informal', 'non-formal' and 'formal'<sup>1</sup> and between learning and teaching. I first discovered 'credit' while working at the Centre. In 1996 I began working for a new regional Open College Network in West and North Yorkshire and then later for the National Open College Network (NOCN), where I gathered evidence for the UK Department for Education and Employment (NOCN 2002) about how OCN practice – using the credit device - could fulfil some of the apparent aspirations expressed in Government reform plans (Qualifications and Curriculum Authority 2004). This led to the National Institute for Adult and Continuing Education (NIACE<sup>2</sup>) commissioning NOCN to conduct research into OCN practice and quality assurance in Adult and Community Learning (ACL) (Lillis, Sparrow 2004).

Credit Works' aim was to influence and shape how learning achievements could be recognised in the emerging reform of qualifications systems in countries of the UK and beyond. We (my co-director Carole Stott and I) worked concurrently on research intended to show how current qualification systems might be reformed and new qualification frameworks implemented in Wales (Lillis, Stott 2005a); on testing new approaches in England and evaluating them for wider application in England (Lillis, Stott 2005c; 2005d); leading to larger scale capacity building projects with Sector Skills

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<sup>1</sup> For descriptions of formal, non-formal and informal learning, see: <http://www.oecd.org/edu/skills-beyond-school/recognitionofnon-formalandinformallearning-home.htm>

<sup>2</sup> In January 2016 NIACE was subsumed into the [Learning and Work Institute](#).

Councils (Lillis, Stott 2009) and eventually to testing ways of using credit to increase mobility across Further Education (FE) and Higher Education (HE) boundaries (Skills for Care 2013). I still work in this field. I was responsible for designing the Skills for Health Bridging Programme, producing a report on the project and future plans for its implementation (Skills for Health 2015). This national (England) project enacts recommendations from the Cavendish Review (2013) and is designed to facilitate progression for the healthcare support workforce, into professional health education programmes at universities in England.

## **1.2 Initial emergence of the ‘practitioner-researcher’ subjectivity**

This following section serves two purposes: to show how early practice (and emergent theorising from that practice) influenced how I was to think and operate later in producing the selected Public Works and other research, as a ‘practitioner-researcher’ – a subject identity explored in subsequent chapters; and to explain the origins of my interest in the exercise of control over production of discourses (and particularly written texts), a key theme explored in critical re-evaluation of the Public Works, using the approach set out in Chapter 2.

In 1980-1981, I studied sociolinguistics and the philosophy of grammar at Manchester University, pursuing a postgraduate Diploma in Teaching English Overseas. I co-authored a dissertation on gender and race (and other) stereotyping in selected English language teaching texts (Martin, Lillis 1982), where we examined how specific social realities were constructed through texts and images used to teach English to non-native speakers. We also suggested some practical ways of addressing the issue of gender and other forms of stereotyping in such texts, for teachers of English language faced with having to use them.

The dissertation title came from a teaching text (Hartley, Viney 1978) that introduced the future form of the auxiliary verb, *‘going to’*, using it to predict, with apparent certainty, that mothers of the bride and groom at a pictured wedding were *‘going to cry’*. Such written texts – the starting points and often the rule books for much English language teaching and learning - were imbued with representational social realities; as vehicles intended to convey meaning, circumscribing how verbal and written English language should or could be used. Our interest was in analysing how published texts with one apparent purpose (teaching English language) were used to introduce and or

normalise sexist and ethnocentric attitudes and behaviours – what Norman Fairclough might later describe as an exercise of ‘power behind discourse’ (Fairclough 1992).

In 1985, at the Centre Against Unemployment, I interviewed unemployed learners on a ‘second-chance’ course, writing down their verbal texts and contextualising them for the reader, for a Warwick University study (Field 1986). These two experiences presented different but interconnected difficulties. In the first, we (my fellow student and I) were struggling to understand how as *practitioners* (teachers) we would make use of English Language teaching materials which depended upon the use of stereotypes in constructed social realities to convey meaning – and what our course of action would mean for the people we taught.

In the second, I found it difficult as a *researcher* (a collector and writer of people’s stories, called ‘case studies’) to represent in writing in any absolute way, the ‘truths’ as I heard and witnessed them, being spoken by unemployed people about their experiences of learning and what these experiences meant for them. How could I represent social contexts (for example, a day care centre attended by one interviewee with cerebral palsy) and other (verbal, visual, physical) semiotic practices and tell the personal stories behind what each had to say and how they behaved? The relationship was unequal, I had control of the discourse and as such I would now say I was positioned to ‘outscale’ the interviewees (Uitemark 2002 cited in Blommaert 2006: 6) and expected to elevate the discourse from the ‘momentary to the timeless’, ‘synoptically reformulating’ what they each had to say, ‘converting the terms used [momentarily] by the client into [timeless] institutionally...sanctioned terms’ (Blommaert 2006: 8)<sup>3</sup>.

In these two apparently unconnected early professional experiences in language teaching and community work, I found myself positioned as a subject under complex forms of invisible control, constrained in how I operated as a *practitioner* or as a *researcher*, searching for ways to circumvent that control. Discovery of these constraints, far from liberating me from them, confirmed their authority over how I acted and what and how I wrote. But I was also positioned to exercise control, however troubled I might be by that experience. A conscious struggle to understand and develop a means to operate creatively within such constraints, while maintaining a morally defensible position and finding a creative space in which to operate, began here.

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<sup>3</sup> For a description of ‘scale-jumping’ in operation in selected Public Works, see 4.5, 5.3 below.



I moved north to Leeds, and John Field from Warwick University sent me a few photocopied pages from Fairclough's new book,

Part of what is implied in the notion of social practice is that people are enabled through being constrained; they are able to act on condition that they act within the constraints of types of practice – or of discourse. However, this makes social practice sound more rigid than it is; ...being socially constrained does not preclude being creative. (Fairclough 2014: 60-61)

This began to help me understand how I had tried to operate *creatively* as a subject, within the constraints I had experienced earlier as a language teaching *practitioner* and signalled how I might find myself positioned to represent 'truth' (in later work for the Public Works), after my first experience as a *researcher*.

I also found out that Fairclough was informed and influenced by Foucault. The latter's 'Orders of Discourse' (Foucault 1971) seemed to speak from the world I had experienced, as an English Language teacher and then as a community worker, in Northampton and Leeds.

I am supposing that in every society the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organised and redistributed according to a certain number of procedures, whose role is to avert its powers and its dangers, to cope with chance events, to evade its ponderous, awesome materiality. (Foucault 1971: 8)

Fairclough's socio-political interpretation of Foucault's philosophy grounded some of Foucault's more opaque observations for me; it was familiar and accessible and even if his theoretical position appeared to diverge from Foucault, it was initially through Fairclough I began to find a way to understand what Foucault meant.

By late 1989, I found myself working in a multi-purpose community project in Leeds 6, a neighbourhood in the 'dark heart of Britain' (Davies 1997), certainly a potential context for 'critical language study' (Fairclough 2014: 229-230). I was however, now strictly a community worker *practitioner*, with no explicit connection to critical language (or any other) study or research. I was expected to *act* to help improve the life chances of people in those Leeds 6 neighbourhoods.

I was conscious daily of how power over and in discourse charged almost everything done in the Leeds community project, and after my experiences at The Centre Against Unemployment believed that any opportunity to wrest some of the control of discourse from those in authority that held it should be used, in the interests of those that lacked power and any agency to influence or change those that held it.<sup>4</sup>

What I called an 'internal discourse' of my own continued. This involved reading and thinking, listening and talking, about how to address in practice the issue that power over and in language formed and constrained behaviour and practice in community work and in non-formal and informal education outside education institutions. This 'internal discourse' informed and began to shape what I had to say about community work and guided the courses of my *practitioner* action. I began as a *practitioner* to find a voice as an 'author' of ideas and to use these to secure support for courses of action within the communities of practice in which I operated, from those in authority; inside written texts which proposed rationales for adjusting and changing ways of working, woven into business planning for the community project, set out in bids for funds, in workshop presentations and project reports. I found that as a *practitioner*, positioned to *act*, I could also act as *researcher* and move between these subject identities in search of a creative space to operate, within governmental authority, '[subject] to the rules of social games and [using] the ability to capitalise on them' (Heikkinen et al. 1999: 145).

On reflection now, I would say that I was beginning to adopt a theoretical position from that practice, one informed by Foucault and Fairclough, experiencing a visceral recognition of the interplay between 'knowledge, government and power' (Foucault 1971) in the exercise of control over discourse and how I operated (or might operate) as a subject. Blommaert's thinking (2006, 2005) became important as I considered these experiences more deeply, in pursuing this analysis.

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<sup>4</sup> In 1991 this led me to explore practical ways of using the emerging Open College Network credit system to express learning outcomes (in writing, within a codified system) to recognise achievement in the Leeds community project; using credit to make explicit and to celebrate the value of learning that went unrecognised, outside learning institutions and qualification systems. We (the community project organisation and its users) were allowed, within OCN's codified boundaries, to produce written sets of learning outcomes and assessment criteria ourselves and to take part in decision-making approval processes. This felt like a new and radical departure; a process which meant generating and scrutinising written texts in stages, involving learner representatives in decision making, about what they would learn and what criteria would be used to judge their achievements – a new form of negotiated learning, written down and formally, explicitly agreed by an educational institution (the OCN) whose members (FE Colleges, Local Education Authorities, universities and voluntary organisations) had invested in it a mutually agreed level of authority to recognise and certificate achievement.

Having described these experiences, I would like to make two observations - which should be made now, though they actually emerged from analysis of the selected Public Works a little later. The 'author' experiences described so far are instances where I found a creative space to operate inside the *practitioner-researcher* subject identities. This is explained in more detail in Chapter 2 and in subsequent analysis of the selected Public Works.

Secondly, I now believe that an 'internal discourse' is a problematic characterisation; in the discourses in which I operated as a social subject in my early professional life, I neither operated alone, nor acted without the authority of others holding power over the discourses in which I was positioned as a subject. And there were other subjectivities; those institutions and individuals that held power were also subject to it. This experience is consistent with Bakhtin's (1981) description of resistance to 'authoritative' discourse, where the subject or actor struggles against the 'imposition of centripetal, monologic, authoritative discourses', through 'centrifugal, dialogic internally persuasive discourses' to find 'a new way to mean'. (Lillis 2003b). So although the experience of 'internal discourse' was not solitary but dialogic, the creative space inside the practitioner-researcher identity helped me gain some fleeting control over discourse and express ideas in new ways.

And one clarification before I go further: though each Public Work was connected to or commissioned by an agency of state government, the term 'government' refers throughout to 'power over free subjects', 'a more or less organised cluster of relations of government' (Heikkinen, et al. 1999: 146) and I will try to be explicit about these as they arise. 'State' or capital 'G', 'Government' is used to differentiate where necessary.

Sections 1.1 and 1.2 introduced the theme of my practitioner-researcher 'subjectivity'. Sections 1.3-1.5 below introduce the theme of the operation and control of 'power' in my specialised field of interest and in 1.6, the theme of 'knowledge' is introduced - the selected Public Works themselves. These themes are reflected in the methodological approach and analysis I have adopted in recontextualising the Public Works throughout.

### **1.3 My specialised field of interest: discourses in the reform of qualifications systems in England and Wales, post 2000.**

‘Adult Learning’ in this Context Statement refers to post-compulsory, publicly funded learning provision for people aged over 16, provided outside Higher Education Institutions in England and Wales. ‘Adult learning reform’ refers to changes that were presaged and then made to qualification systems and to the public funding of Adult Learning provision, after the publication of ‘The Learning Age’ (Department for Education and Employment 2000) and the establishment of the Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales (CQFW) (Welsh Assembly Government 2015). ‘Reform’ is not *ipso facto*, a synonym for ‘improvement’ in this Context Statement; it is used only as the repeated and common term to indicate Government (State) driven proposals for, or changes to the systems and funding described.

My specialised field of interest here, is the examination of the potential for, development of and operation of credit systems and practice in the establishment of the CQFW (Welsh Assembly Government 2015) and the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) (Ofqual 2008) for England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Though the QCF operated in Northern Ireland, the Public Works were commissioned (paid for) by bodies with authority, control and interest only in either England or Wales and the content of each Public Work report reflects this.<sup>5</sup>

The selected Public Works are situated along the trajectories of two phases of adult learning reform; those that emerged in the UK under the ‘New Labour’ Government from 1997 onwards and those that followed the Wolf Report (2011). Chapter 3 reviews the span of academic literature which responded to these reforms and examines how the early narrowing of the concept of what constituted (publicly funded) lifelong learning – controlled through increasing centralisation of adult learning reform discourses - was to affect the course of these reforms, and how the exercise of centripetal government forces controlled production of the Public Works themselves.

### **1.4 The emergence of the concept of credit in post 2000 qualifications reform**

Credit systems and practices were to become central to the reform of qualifications systems, in establishing the CQFW and QCF. ‘Credit’ is present in both Framework titles, acting as a signifier of change and a prescription; in both frameworks all qualifications would at least have credit values

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<sup>5</sup> The described adult learning reforms in England and Wales did borrow from preceding work in Northern Ireland (Welsh Assembly Government 2015) (Qualifications and Curriculum Authority 2004). This earlier work is also acknowledged by SEEC (2010: 17).

and levels attributed to them and though the creation and operation of rules for each framework differed, the fundamental concept and meaning attributed to 'credit' in relation to both qualification frameworks was to be almost the same. Those discourses that brought both frameworks into being and how those discourses were controlled is examined in recontextualisation of the first three Public Works (Lillis, Sparrow 2004; Lillis, Stott 2005a; 2009).

By the time working regulations for the QCF had been published (Ofqual 2007), the fundamental language of 'credit-based' qualifications was established, its origins (in the UK) in OCN accreditation practice (Wilson 2010), the Higher Education Credit Initiative Wales (HECIW 1996) and the 'NICATS' project (1999), much of this language already adopted in the establishment of the CQFW (Welsh Assembly Government 2015). Over time, the network of OCNs had evolved and operated credit systems and practices, assigning credit to learning programmes, rather than qualifications. OCNs were at their inception, primarily concerned with recognising achievements *outside* qualifications and qualification systems. The following descriptions of the key components of a credit framework are summarised from the glossary associated with QCF regulations (Ofqual 2008) and from sources elsewhere (Lillis, Stott 2005a) and The Southern England Consortium for Credit Accumulation and Transfer (SEEC 2010).

They are included here to assist the reader; re-occurring as they do, throughout this Context Statement. The 3 key components of a credit framework are *units* which each have a *credit* value and *level*.<sup>6</sup> Sets of learning outcomes and associated assessment criteria are organised into units which are each assigned a level and an appropriate credit value. A *learning outcome* is a statement of what a learner can be expected to know, understand or do as a result of a process of learning. *Assessment criteria* are descriptions of the requirements a learner is expected to meet to demonstrate that a learning outcome has been achieved. The *credit value assigned to a unit* reflects the learning time it takes a person (on average) to achieve that set of learning outcomes to the standard determined by the assessment criteria. In the UK all qualification frameworks assign 1 credit to ten hours of learning time. 'Credit *level* descriptors define the level of complexity, relative demand and autonomy

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<sup>6</sup> The Southern England Consortium for Credit Accumulation and Transfer (SEEC) issued revised credit level descriptors for Higher Education in 2010 which took account of (among other developments in credit practice and guidance) the introduction of the QCF, SCQF, CQFW and 'the harmonisation of definitions and the use of credit across Europe.' (SEEC 2010: 5). The SEEC credit level descriptors begin at level 3 but the principles used in their production can be applied to learning at levels 1 and 2. Entry level and level 1 and 2 descriptors for the Regulated Qualification Framework (RQF) are available (Ofqual 2015b).

expected of a learner on completion of a module or programme of learning. They provide a description of levels of learning through a hierarchy of knowledge and skills.’ (SEEC 2010: 5)

A qualification within the QCF is an award made to a person for the achievement of a specified combination of credits, or credits and exemptions, required for that award. Credits can be combined and accumulated towards particular targets. These targets may include achievement of whole qualifications, each of which specify rules for achieving and combining credit to achieve that qualification.

Credit systems were incorporated into design principles and regulations for the new QCF (Ofqual 2008). A credit framework need not include qualifications as described, nor prescribe rules for how credit is combined for it to be awarded. Though it was possible for credit to be awarded for the achievement of individual units in the QCF, no unit was visibly available for use in the QCF unless it was included in an Ofqual approved (‘accredited’) qualification (Ofqual 2008). Qualifications had been and were to continue to be, the metric for measuring learning achievement *and* for allocating the public funding of Adult Learning (LSC 2007).

‘Credit’ also acted as a signifier of change in the QCF and CQFW, with positive attributions, including ‘flexibility’ and ‘responsiveness’ for each framework (Ofqual 2008; Welsh Assembly Government 2015), contrasting with what was reported to be wrong with the qualification system that preceded their introduction (Lester 2011). ‘Accreditation practice’ throughout is a generalised reference to systems and process for recognising specified learning achievements, including, though not exclusive to, those within credit-based qualification frameworks.

### **1.5 How the Public Works relate to the discursive field of described adult learning reform**

Credit and its potential to act as a catalyst in reforming adult learning was explored throughout the 1990s (Dearing 1997; Kennedy 1997; Further Education Unit (FEU 1991, 1995a). Three Public Works selected (Lillis, Sparrow 2004; Lillis, Stott 2005a; 2009) contributed to the specialised discourses of adult learning reforms described, examining credit practice and contributing to the design and operation of credit in two new qualification frameworks in the UK. Until these works were produced, little had been published on how credit practice (rather than concepts and theory) in adult learning might have application for the creation and operation of new qualification frameworks, which

Governments believed could act as a major catalyst in changing the way in which adult learning was provided, recognised and valued (Qualifications and Curriculum Authority 2004; Welsh Assembly Government 2015). The fourth Public Work selected (Skills for Care 2013) sought to create a national scheme for effective credit transfer between Further and Higher Education qualification frameworks, and made a contribution to discourses concerning credit transfer within and across qualifications and qualification frameworks in the UK. Recognition inside universities of the value and validity of vocational learning (outside universities), for entry and advanced standing in Higher Education continues to be a key area of interest (Parry 2011a, 2011b, 2012; Powell, et al. 2012;).

### **1.6 The selected Public Works**

The three Public Works recontextualised in Chapters 4-6 of this Context Statement, are (respectively, in chapter order) concerned with the examination of Open College Network (OCN) credit practice in England, outside the then National Qualifications Framework (NQF) and the potential application of OCN credit for recognising individual achievements and for quality assuring 'non-accredited' Local Education Authority (LEA) 'adult and community learning' (ACL) in England (Lillis, Sparrow 2004); the development of credit expertise among Awarding Organisations in the establishment of the Credit and Qualifications for Wales (Lillis, Stott 2005a); and the development of and application of credit expertise in Sector Skills Councils and Standard Setting Bodies, designing qualifications for the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) (Lillis, Stott 2009).

The fourth Public Work (Skills for Care 2013) (Chapter 7) describes the design and implementation of a national scheme to support progression into university qualifications in England from specified vocational qualifications in the QCF, by effectively enabling the transfer of credit from QCF qualifications embedded in a Level 5 Higher Apprenticeship in Adult Social Care into Level 5 University Diploma qualifications within the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ). All four Public Works were concerned with the potential for and application of credit in qualifications frameworks in England and Wales. Credit was central to the reform of those qualification systems reformed in the UK post 2000. Credit systems and practice are my specialised field of interest. Works were selected which were located in the distinctive but interconnected, specialised discourses of these qualifications reforms; lend themselves to an analysis of how these discourses were controlled and how I operated and became constituted as a subject within and through discursive constraints.

Each Public Work was produced at a key point in the constitution of my 'practitioner-researcher' subject identities.

In addition, each Public Work: was intended to be transformative, of thought and action, within and across organisations and interest groups in one or more countries of the UK; is an instance where I led the Public Work and was responsible for writing the report; illustrates how qualifications and adult learning reform objectives were influenced and changed by the works themselves; and hopefully contributes to a readable narrative for this Context Statement.

I have selected four Public Works reports, as instances of written discourses in the adult learning reforms described:

1. *The Rewards of Recognition: the value of NOCN Accreditation, Quality Assurance and Development for Non-Accredited Learning.* (NIACE 2003).
2. *Learning from experience – implementing credit: A Comparative Analysis of Awarding Body Credit Practice within the Credit and Qualification Framework for Wales.* (Federation of Awarding Bodies 2005)
3. *Getting the best from the QCF: Final report on the support and capacity building programme for UK Sector Skills Councils and Standard Setting Bodies, for the development of units and qualifications as part of the VQ reform programme (including QCF) and the alignment of priority qualifications with public funding.* (Learning and Skills Council 2009)
4. *New routes into university for people working in adult social care.* (Skills for Care 2013)

Policy makers and influencers had different perceptions of how and what the 'credit device' might transform and who would lead and control that transformation. Some hoped it would help reach learners that the current system did not reach; others that it might help produce better value for public money, or better equip the workforce for globalisation, others that it might at last enable breach of the wall between academic and vocational learning in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. These aspirations perhaps say more about what was judged to be wrong with Adult Learning by 2000, than what credit (of itself) could do to put these wrongs right.

...let's not forget that credit is simply a great device. As this report illustrates, it is the processes and structures around credit, and the people who bring their skills and knowledge



to its use and application, that provide the real solution and power to bring about transformation. (Lillis, Sparrow: 3)

Critical re-examination of the Public Works analyses the exercise of power in and behind some of the important discourses that controlled them and what such control may have meant for their success, and whether this re-examination says anything useful for scrutiny of the conduct of adult learning reform discourses now.

### **1.7 Exclusion: leaving Foucault outside**

The reader will notice that Foucault (and others) remain invisible in the Public Works reports; the (always paying) client would have seen references to these as ultimately unnecessary to the task they commissioned (and problematised) and a potential diversion from the proposal of solutions. Our clients sometimes complained that universities tended to be good at reviewing literature and restating known problems, and poor at suggesting what to do about them. What Government and their agents wanted we were told, was 'solutions', requirements that in themselves demanded certain deliberate exclusions of critical analysis from written Public Work discourses. From 2004, as co-director I was helping to building Credit Works' reputation for producing credible, *practitioner* informed solutions to perceived failures in adult and particularly adult vocational learning, which our clients believed could be righted or at least addressed in part, through reform of qualifications systems. Many of the complexities (alignments, oppositions and conditionalities) that we discovered, were for us to overcome or navigate on route to solutions and were often to remain unstated in final reports. Even if a client acknowledged and expressed interest in these complexities in spoken discourse, perhaps knowing they informed or even underpinned our analysis and proposed solutions, such complexities were excluded as 'not necessarily for the report'. This exclusion is an example, alongside others that emerge in analysis of the Public Works, of how the written discourses of the Public Works themselves were constrained in their production. The Doctorate provides an opportunity to view the production of each Public Work through a critical discourse lens. A key question I examine in later chapters is how such exclusions and constraints were to shape how I operated and was constituted as a subject under them. Foucault may have remained invisible but I believe was there all the time.

## 1.8 Summary of Chapters 2-8

**Chapter 2, *Squinting through a Foucauldian Prism*** introduces and explains an approach I have adapted for recontextualisation of the selected Public Works and why I have followed it. I first outline some interpretations of Foucault's thinking on subject positioning and control of discourse and how this informs my approach, and outline a rationale for the inclusion of 'discursive practices' in my analysis. I then explain how I use the adapted approach in analysis of the Public Works.

**Chapter 3, *The exercise of government power in controlling described adult learning reform discourses*** reviews the span of literature which responded to described adult learning reforms and examines how the early narrowing of the concept of what constituted (publicly funded) lifelong learning – controlled through increasing centralisation of adult learning reform discourses - was to affect the conduct and course of these adult learning reforms, and in the exercise of centripetal government power, control production of the Public Works themselves.

**Chapter 4, *The Rewards of Recognition: the value of NOCN Accreditation, Quality Assurance and Development for Non-Accredited Learning*** uncovers the contestability of what constituted 'Adult and Community Learning' and what should be funded under the category of 'other' adult learning provision under the Learning and Skills Act 2000; and how in subjecting myself to the 'internal rules of discourse', I could operate creatively, positioned among other subjectivities at play in this Public Work.

**Chapter 5, *Learning from experience – implementing credit: A Comparative Analysis of Awarding Body Credit Practice within the Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales***, describes a successful ESF project for the CQFW, building credit expertise in five Awarding Organisations (AOs), producing an evaluative report and written guidance on assigning credit; how AOs cooperated to centre control of discourse and practice in their own interests; how creation of the Credit Works subject co-identity increased the positional strength of my co-researcher and I and reduced our individual vulnerability.

**Chapter 6, *Final report on the support and capacity building programme for UK Sector Skills Councils and Standard Setting Bodies, for the development of units and qualifications as part of the VQ reform programme (including QCF) and the alignment of priority qualifications with public***

*funding*, developed 22 SBs' understanding of and ability to design credit based qualifications; how the discourse was oriented towards the instrumental goal of producing 'aligned' QCF qualifications for public funding; how Credit Works was morally and practically committed to persuade; but as knowing subjects positioned by agents of government, were conscious throughout of its power to coerce.

**Chapter 7, *New routes into university for people working in adult social care***, describes an innovation in Higher Apprenticeship development, creating a national scheme with multiple HEIs to accept credit from the QCF as having equal value in FHEQ qualifications, opening up routes into university for experienced social care managers; and though constrained in *production* of the progress report, how I was given a high degree of freedom to operate creatively in *conduct* of the Public Work, collaborating with practitioners in vocational learning and higher education, across institutional boundaries, on behalf of an employer network.

**Chapter 8, *Cataloguing the possibilities: imagination and creativity inside the constraints of Public Work discourses*** distils one 'catalogue of possibilities' from the 'KPS' analysis of the selected Public Works; assesses the impact of the Public Works on the constitution of my practitioner-researcher subjectivity; summarises their impact on adult learning reform discourse; and outlines the possible direction of personal and professional development and research.

## **Chapter 2 Squinting through a Foucauldian prism**

### **2.1 Introduction**

In Chapter 1 I explained how an emergent understanding of discourse analysis helped me to consider issues and questions arising as a practitioner of English language teaching and community work and then how this understanding began to influence and shape my practice, and the effects of this perspective on subsequent approaches adopted in production and recontextualisation of the four Public Works.

In this chapter I will introduce and explain an approach I have adapted for recontextualisation of the selected Public Works and why I have followed it. I first outline some interpretations of Foucault's thinking on subject positioning and control of discourse and how this informs my approach, and outline a rationale for the inclusion of 'discursive practices' in my analysis. I then explain how I use the adapted approach in analysis of the Public Works.

### **2.2 Foucault, subjects and their positioning in the discourse of each Public Work**

As I said in Chapter 1, Fairclough's familiar socio-political analysis helped me, in my early professional life, to understand (or to believe I could interpret) what Foucault meant, that 'in every society the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organised and redistributed by a...number of procedures' (Gutting 1981: 52); that everyone is constrained by rules that 'order' discourse but as Fairclough suggests, may be enabled to operate creatively within these rules (Fairclough 2014: 69).

Dominant in my professional life has been a developing consciousness of my own subjectivity within these 'orders of discourse' and questions of how (or whether and when) I have operated and operate creatively within them. Pursuing the Doctorate has allowed me to consider these questions more deeply, subject the selected Public Works to a particular scrutiny, with the aim of shedding light on how the discourses involved were constrained and controlled and suggest some possible consequences for that; and to examine how my own subjectivity (and the subjectivity of others) was constituted in the processes of their production.

My interest was to find, among the many interpretations of Foucault's work, analyses and approaches which would allow me to examine both the 'text and context' (Fairclough 1993) of Public Work discourses in this scrutinising process; and in particular how, what Blommaert (2005) calls 'centering institutions' - which 'regulate activities and to which people orient in constructing their/our imaginary of what counts as appropriate' (Lillis 2013b: 113) - controlled the production and possibly the 'uptake' (then and now) (Lillis 2013b: 110) of the Public Work discourses.

Young's introduction (1981, ed.: 1-29) 'unties' the text of 'Orders of Discourse' (Foucault 1971), claiming centrality for Foucault's concept of 'will to knowledge' and how the boundaries of discourse are not limited to speech or thought (or their manifestations in written texts) but include all the rules that obtain in their production, which are in and of themselves assumed and beyond which lies only incomprehension. Power is concentrated in operation of these rules of discourse which both enable and constrain the production of knowledge (Foucault 1971).

Our 'will to truth' (Foucault 1971: 10) is a motivating force, an exercise of power, to produce or display knowledge in ways which lay claim to its veracity, and indisputability. 'Exclusions' serve our will to truth: through prohibitions (taboos, rituals and privileges), and in the rejection of discourses which to a closed 'fellowship of knowledge' lie outside the boundaries of its own reason. Truth-saying is in the control of such fellowships or social structures, which themselves shift, divide and align in new networks, according to their objects, continuously seeking power over discourse. (Foucault 1971: 18).

Foucault (1971: 12) says that there are also 'internal rules of discourse': an endless (secondary) repetition through 'commentary' on primary texts which reinforces the power of primary knowledge, creating innumerable new discourses (1971: 15); the *author* operating not as an originator of discourse but signalling, (by selectively repeating and modifying), the value of primary knowledge (Foucault 1971: 13), operating as a 'unifying and rationalising instrument' of discourse itself; a 'subject'. A subject may be an individual (operating under the constraints described) but is as likely to be an institution or a network of institutions, operating under the rules of that discourse. These discursal constraints upon the subject are severe, Foucault argues, and we should look for glimpses of truth in 'the spaces of a wild exteriority' (Foucault 1981: 61).

Fairclough argues that the 'speaker or writer [of texts] is a *product* of her words'. He also says that 'there is a dialectical process in discourse wherein the subject is both created and creative' (Fairclough 2014: 124).

The subject then is constrained by the rules of discourse and may operate creatively within those constraints, but not alone,

With individual creativity...never the wilful and extra-social business it is commonly portrayed as being; there are always particular social circumstances which enable it, and constrain it, and which may even...partially vitiate it. (Fairclough 2014: 198)

The social process of producing social subjects can be conceived of in terms of the positioning of people progressively over a period of years – indeed a lifetime – in a range of subject positions. (Fairclough 2014: 123).

So social subjects do not act alone, are governed by the rules of discourse they are positioned within which may increase in number and vary over time. Their place and behaviours in discourse may be constrained by the particularities of one or more of the 'discourse types' (Fairclough 2014: 61-63) they are engaged in (for example, a conversation, court proceedings, a police interview, an academic article, a written report) and their discourses regulated by 'centering institutions' (Blommaert 2005: 75), which 'generate indexicalities to which others have to orient'<sup>7</sup>. Subjects may operate using a range of discourse types, within one discourse, or across a range of discourses and adopt (at will, by compunction or imposition) different subject identities in so doing. Fairclough looks for some light and air for the social subject however, suggesting that they 'draw on' rather than 'mechanically' enact 'a combination of discourse types'; modifying Foucault's 'repetition' as 'reproduction', 'which may be basically conservative...or basically transformatory, effecting changes' (Fairclough 2014: 69).

Lillis (2013: 125-149) provides an overview of concepts and tools for examining writing as 'identity work', explaining how opportunities for writing are governed; by 'the social structuring of resources, habitus', and 'the inscription of resources with identity positions' (2013: 147). 'Writing may be used as a specific activity to carve out a space for identity work in terms of voice or existence of self but is more often nested within other activities and bound up with identity work relating to such

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<sup>7</sup> For illustrations of 'indexicality' in relation to the Public Works, see 3.2, 4.3, 8.2, 8.3 below.

activities'. These identities may be 'layered onto other dimensions', for example, 'gender...layered onto specific domains of social activity...writing as part of the identity work of a lawyer, a teacher, etc.' (Lillis, T 2013: 125-149).

The subject may be required (or may try) to adopt more than one identity in the production of written discourses and why and how the subject is positioned or responds to that positioning may relate to expectations governed by some of the factors outlined, and or the particular requirements of discourse types. What does this mean for a re-examination of myself and others (individuals, institutions) as subjects positioned inside the discourse of each Public Work? Do these descriptions broadly resonate with my professional experience?

I was (I suggest, and will examine) expected to enact 'a combination of discourse types' and be ready to shift from one subject position to another (and shift habitual writing dispositions and do 'identity work') in production of each Public Work. So in recontextualising the Public Works, the concepts and approaches examined so far begin to point towards an approach I might take in re-examining my professional practice as a subject in the production of the selected Public Works, and in considering implications for my practice now. These questions include: How was my own subjectivity constituted? And if not an originator, operating alone, how did I operate in concert with others to draw on (or repeat) the rules of discourse, and how did identity work play its part in operation of the subject through production of each Public Work, and why? Did I operate creatively within the constraints of each Public Work discourse and how was this managed?

### **2.3 Text and context: discursive practices and text in analysis of each Public Work**

An examination of the Public Works as instances of discourse in a specialised area of adult learning reform requires re-examination of the operation of the rules of discourse involved their production and how power over those discourses included and excluded truth-possibilities. The complexity of relationships between those social structures exercising or vying to exercise power over the Public Work discourses, requires an approach which allows for their inclusion and their sometimes apparently dissonant objects. Hook (2001: 13-17) concurs with Fairclough's view (1992) that discourse is 'a form of practice' and sets out a strong case for 'text and context' to be included in discourse analysis, if it is to reflect Foucault's view that,

a refusal of analyses couched in terms of the symbolic field or the domain of signifying structures, and a recourse to analyses in terms of the genealogy of relations of force, strategic developments, and tactics...The history which determines us has the form of a war rather than that of language: relations of power, not relations of meaning.  
(Burchell, et al. 1991b: 114).

Hook (2001: 17) echoing Fairclough (1993) says that in analysing discourse that we cannot examine text alone, that doing so '*defers to a restrictive focus on linguistic content* which marginalizes the breadth of discursive phenomena beyond the text'. Hook makes the case for inclusion of the examination of 'power relations' in discourse analysis in some detail. Discourse and written texts in particular may possess an 'awesome materiality' of their own (Foucault 1971), but written text is not made in isolation of the 'discursive effects' or practices (Hook 2001: 28) which produced them. Though Fairclough's socio-political analysis is self-confessedly 'not neutral' (Fairclough 2014: 63-67), he does pay attention to context.

Analysis of the text in each Public Work report, requires scrutiny of the context in which institutions (and individuals) exercised power and operated as subjects of that power. This will include, the constraining influence and variable control of 'polycentric, stratified' 'centring institutions' (Blommaert 2005: 75) and subject 'identity work' in the production of each Public Work. 'Context...addresses the way in which linguistic forms - 'text' - become part of, get integrated in, or become constitutive of larger activities in the social world' and my interest is in what effects these contexts had on production and deployment of language in adult learning reform, giving that language its meaning and power. 'The way in which language fits into context is what creates meaning, what makes it (mis)understandable to others.' (Blommaert 2005: 39,40).

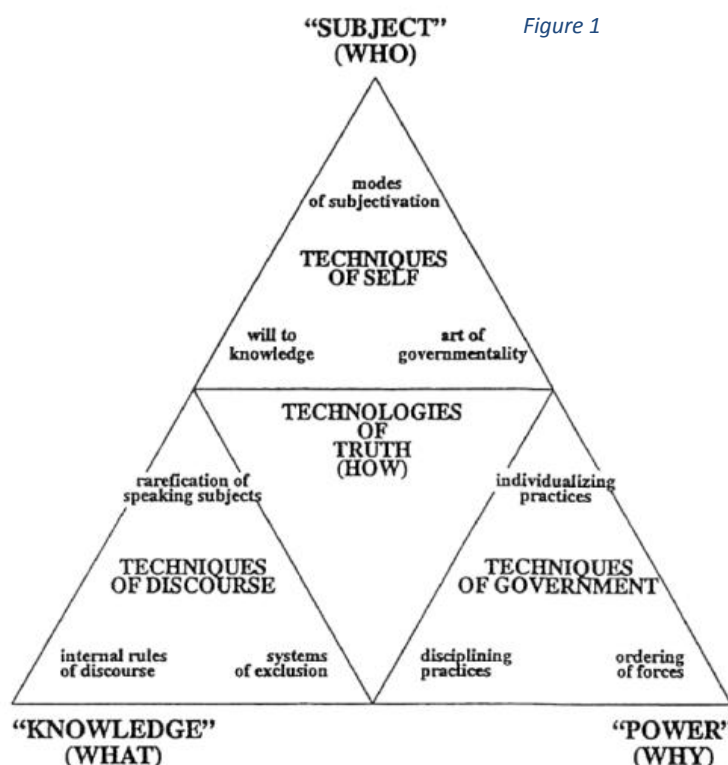
Contextualisations here are limited to those discursive practices employed in the operation of power over the discourses in each Public Work and which emanate from or elide with textual analysis of those discourses. Hook himself admits that in criticising methods of discourse analysis that are oriented almost exclusively towards text (Parker 1992; Potter, Wetherall 1987) he 'has frequently pointed towards a genealogical method as less flawed, yet failed to fully describe or detail what such a genealogical approach would entail' (Hook 2001: 39). Having made a case for the inclusion of discursive practices in discourse analysis, Hook was not at that point quite ready to offer a



genealogical method or approach that accommodated them. What I sought was an approach that could accommodate an adequate analysis of text *and* context, one which allowed me to view the exercise and influence of power in the production and control of knowledge in the discourses within each Public Work and the operation of subjects within them, inter-relationally.

## 2.4 Technologies of Truth

Heikinenn et al. (2012), seek to characterise the elusive Foucault as an 'historian of truth'; not as a butterfly catcher of specific exhibitable 'truths' for all time but as an examiner of truths or presented realities at moments in time. Foucault, they suggest, was interested in how truths were constructed, and used the 'three dimensional space' of 'knowledge, subjectivity and power' (KPS) to analyse 'human games of truth' which employ techniques of self, discourse, and government.



They insist that these three triangulations should be treated as inter-relational and following synchronic reading of Foucault's work, together name them 'Technologies of Truth' (Figure 1, right) (Heikinenn, et al. 2012: 150). 'Relational particles' within the Techniques of Discourse, Government and Self are used to find common themes in Foucault's works, examined and then further divided to produce synchronic and diachronic Foucauldian histories, and briefly used to test the potential of 'Technologies of Truth' as a method for creating a 'catalogue of possibilities' by 'interviewing' texts related to the 'birth of the modern Finnish teacher in state educational discourse', using the three illustrated triangulations (and those triangulations within them) to formulate questions.

*Technologies of Truth* is an attempt to show coherence in the major themes and ideas in Foucault's work. It is not a theory of Foucauldian Truth and in itself could be regarded as a codification, with its own internal rules of discourse - a risk recognised and accepted by the authors themselves. They suggest 'not quite seriously' that 'we might formulate instructions for use as follows':

(1) make sure that the subject of your study is located in the realm of history of truth... (2) Put your research material into the triangle, shake carefully and check if something has been gathered in the corners. *Warning*: Do not push oversized pieces of material into the triangle - all the material must be preworked. (3) Collect the material found in the corners of the triangle and start thinking. *Warning*: remember that the triangle cannot be used as explanation, theory, system etc. You have to create those by yourself. (Heikinenn, et al. 2012: 155)

## **2.5 Adaptability of the 'Technologies of Truth' approach**

Certain important features of this approach make it suitable for my purposes. The method allows for: an inclusion of discursive practices – context and text – in analysing power relations within the discourse of each Public Work; analysis of the operation of (individual and institutional) subjects within those discourses and how I became constituted as a subject; encouragement to scrutinise inter-relationally and synchronically, triangulated Knowledge, Power and Subject; and finally, adaptability, allowing me to ask the questions that interested me most, using their 'not quite seriously' suggested instructions. All the material has been 'preworked', in the production of the Public Works themselves and in their recontextualisation.

I have adapted their method in subjecting the Public Works to a Foucauldian 'KPS' analysis (mindful of the inter-relatedness of 'KPS') but only so far as it is helpful for my purposes: to 'unfold space for new ways to ask questions' (Heikinenn, et al. 2012: 149) *and* bring some coherence to the process of doing so, in order to organise, consider and nuance the questions emerging from reflexive analysis of the 4 Public Works. My interest here is oriented towards adapting and using the methodology outlined in *Technologies of Truth* to interrogate the Public Works, not to test Foucault or his interpreters.

Each work (and the construction of myself as subject) is subjected to an analysis of 'truths' in the production and operation of 'Knowledge, Subjectivity and Power', at the points or periods in time reflected in each of the Public Works. The analysis and emerging questions are used to reveal one 'catalogue of possibilities' (Heikinenn, et al. 2012: 151), considered diachronically in Chapter 8.

The analysis of my own subjectivity in each Public Works is intertwined reflexively with the construction and conduct of the Public Works themselves and how I as '[a] human subject entered into games of truth', in construction of myself as a subject, asking "How?" in the middle of a 'What-Who- Why?' triangle' (Heikinenn, et al. 2012: 149).

Heikinen's approach also allows me to call on the thinking of Blommaert and others in the field of sociolinguistics for help when I need it, in particular the work already cited on 'scales' (Blommaert 2006), 'indexicality', 'stratification' and 'text and context' (Blommaert 2005).

## **2.6 'Unfolding the space to reveal a catalogue of possibilities'; the triangular onion and the prism.**

The subtitle to 'Technologies of Truth' is 'peeling Foucault's triangular onion', the deconstruction of 'KPS' '[resembling] the onion of Peer Gynt: endlessly revealing layer after layer when peeled' (Heikinenn, et al. 2012: 148-149) - the interactions between 'KPS' seamless and never-ending. An onion is peeled in one direction; from the outer layers inwards. My preferred mnemonic is a triangular prism; with three visible facets (KPS), containing within it the 'pre-worked research material' (the Public Works, including myself and others as subjects). Shine a light through the prism and one 'catalogue of possibilities' is revealed in its refraction; but shine the light again at a different angle, or through a different facet and another, different catalogue might be visible.

The beam of light passing through the prism represents the narrative I have chosen to guide the reader and writer through each of the Public Works, angled to reveal a catalogue of possibilities for each Public Work examined in Chapters 4-7. The narrative follows a series of transitions in the specialised field of adult learning reform described, summarised and presented chronologically to aid the reader.

Adaptation of 'Technologies of Truth' (Heikinenn, et al. 2012) for this purpose, uses this three-dimensional 'prismatic' model, situating the four Public Works in the specialised field of adult learning reform, showing respectively:

- i. How an analysis using examples from practice was used to propose actions or solutions to remedy perceived obstacles to participation in and funding of adult learning in England; and how positional knowledge, power and subjectivity influenced the discourses involved and how the results were used to attempt to shape and influence new discourses in the development and funding of 'adult community learning' in England (Lillis, Sparrow 2004) (Chapter 4);
- ii. How discourse was controlled and subjects operated in the design and codification of a new credit based system for recognising achievement in Wales (Welsh Assembly Government 2015) and the influence of this discourse on an emerging regulated credit based qualification system for England, Wales and Northern Ireland (Lillis, Stott 2005) (Chapter 5);
- iii. An analysis of discourse of government agencies and government funded Sector Skills Councils in England in testing 'working regulations' (Ofqual 2007) in the implementation of a new legally regulated credit based qualification framework, the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) for England, Wales and Northern Ireland; (Lillis, Stott 2009) (Ch 6)
- iv. An analysis of the discourse of a Sector Skills Council, providers of publicly funded Further Education and Higher Education, government agencies and regulatory bodies in negotiation of a specification using QCF qualifications to create Higher Apprenticeship pathways, counting credit from QCF level 5 vocational qualifications in Adult Social Care towards achievement of Higher Education Institution qualifications at level 5 and above. (Skills for Care 2013) (Chapter 7)

In parallel with,

- v. My personal development and constitution as a practitioner-researcher subject; and how variations in subject positions, identities (and the operation of other subjectivities in each Public Work discourse) influenced my thinking and practice.

Each Public Work discourse is scrutinised for examples of the operation of Techniques of Discourse (Knowledge), Techniques of Government (Power) and Techniques of Self (the practitioner-researcher subject, institutions and other subjectivities), and the 'triangulated' results summarised in a Table for each Public Work. The results are used to subject each discourse to one or more of the key questions concerning control of discourse and the operation of subjects, outlined in this chapter.

## 2.7 Summary

This chapter examines how and why I came to adapt an approach suited to inter-relational recontextualisation of all four Public Works, one that would allow an analysis which would benefit from broader reading and understanding for this Doctorate, of Foucault and Foucauldian influenced approaches to discourse analysis; an approach where I could examine my own development inter- relationally as a subject within each Public Work discourse and the subjectivities of institutions and individuals positioned in each discourse, including those that held power and may also have been subject to it; the intention being to shed light in subsequent recontextualisations, on how the discourses involved were constrained and controlled and suggest some possible consequences for that; and to examine how my own subjectivity (and the subjectivity of others) was constituted in the processes of their production.

I explore how 'Technologies of Truth' might be adapted to reveal *one* 'catalogue of possibilities' and explain how certain important features of this approach make it suitable for my purposes, their method allowing for: an inclusion of discursive practices – context and text - in analysing power relations within the discourse of each Public Work; analysis of the operation of (individual and institutional) subjects within those discourses and how I became constituted as a subject; encouragement to scrutinise inter- relationally and synchronically, triangulated Knowledge, Power and Subject; and finally, adaptability, allowing me to ask the questions that interest me most, using their 'not quite seriously' suggested instructions, calling on the thinking of Blommaert and others in the field of sociolinguistics for help when I need it, in particular the work already cited on 'scales' (Blommaert 2006), 'indexicality', 'stratification' and text 'and context' (Blommaert 2005).

I have adapted the 'Heikinenn' method with the intention of producing a triangulated, prismatic view: three visible facets of Knowledge, Power and Subjectivity (KPS), containing within it the 'pre-worked research material' (the Public Works, including myself and others as subjects). Shine a light through the prism and one 'catalogue of possibilities' is revealed in its refraction; but shine the light again at a different angle, or through a different facet and another, different catalogue might be visible.

Each Public Work discourse is subsequently scrutinised using this approach; for examples of the operation of Techniques of Discourse (Knowledge), Techniques of Government (Power) and Techniques of Self (the practitioner-researcher subject, institutions and other individual subjectivities), and the results summarised in a Table for each Public Work. The results are then used to subject each discourse to one or more of the key questions concerning control of discourse and the operation of subjects, outlined in this chapter.

## **Chapter 3 The exercise of government power in controlling described adult learning reform discourses**

### **3.1 Introduction**

Subsequent recontextualisations (Chapters 4-7) concentrate on analysis of the exercise of 'KPS' in production of each of the Public Work discourses themselves and some of the discursive practices surrounding their individual production. The selected Public Works are however, situated along the trajectories of two phases of adult learning reform; those that emerged in the UK under the 'New Labour' Government from 1997 onwards and those that followed the Wolf Report (2011). The purpose of this chapter is to review the span of literature which responded to these reforms and examine how the early narrowing of the concept of what constituted (publicly funded) lifelong learning – controlled through increasing centralisation of adult learning reform discourses - was to affect the conduct and course of these adult learning reforms, and in the exercise of centripetal forces, control production of the Public Works themselves.

### **3.2 The narrowing characterisation of lifelong learning and learners, and the place of credit (and qualification) frameworks in the genesis of described adult learning reforms**

A review (Tight 1998) of three influential reports from the beginning of the adult learning reform period described: the Kennedy Report (1997), Dearing Report (National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education 1997) and Fryer Report (1997) suggested these publications had three faults in common: an over-emphasis on 'vocational learning [as an economic solution]'; the 'blaming of failures [of adult learning] on non participants'; and 'threats of economic and social exclusion' for future non participants.

A comparative typology of 'non-participants' in publicly funded 'lifelong learning' (Tight 1998: 480) and a correlated comparative analysis of 'strategies for change' (Tight 1998: 479) across the three reports, shows how they shared a negative characterisation of those that did not participate in 'lifelong learning' as (for example): people 'without qualifications'; 'disaffected youth'; 'people with literacy difficulties'; as well as listing particular BME (black and minority ethnic) groups; and then sharing some common strategies on what should be done to involve them, including: the redistribution of public resources; different and better ways of using information technology in learning; better access to personal support, e.g. childcare, information, advice and guidance.

Lifelong learning in its early definition was meant to involve all learners and all learning (Tuijnman, et al. 2002), but in each reviewed report it appeared to begin only after age 16 - the then working age in the UK - and be primarily vocational: public resources should be spent on educating designated groups of non-participants to secure their better economic engagement and performance through vocational learning (Tight 1998: 478). The review quotes 'The Learning Age' Government consultation paper on Lifelong Learning (Secretary of State for Education and Employment 1998: 26) which made it clear that in future, resources would be targeted at involving non-participants in learning which had a perceived economic value. Other adults and their employers would have to fend for themselves (whatever the learning), confirming what the reports suggested should be the focus of adult learning reforms and who should benefit from them.

Publicly funded 'Lifelong Learning' was now to be (mostly) vocational learning, targeted at certain categories of people aged over 16 and the three reviewed reports suggested qualification systems would need to be improved to better accommodate these people and their vocational learning achievements.

The 'strategies for change' (Tight 1998: 479) listed from each report included a total of (what can be construed as) seven features of improved qualification systems, with two explicit references to credit and five other features possessing positive characteristics attributed to credit frameworks in earlier FEU work (1991, 1995a). These positive characteristics were still being claimed for the QCF in later years (Ofqual 2008).

The idea of developing a 'system of commonly understood credits' for 'adult learners' was mooted for consultation in 'The Learning Age' (Secretary of State for Education and Employment 1998: Section 6) which referred to a need for 'small steps' and 'small sections' of learning, suggesting the possible establishment of a credit framework for 'certain' adult learners for whom 'a full qualification might not be the right goal'. At this stage the mooted credit framework did not appear to be for all, or for all qualifications.

But between the publication of 'The Learning Age' and the birth of the QCF (Ofqual 2008), public funding of adult learning had been segmented into 'qualifications' (in the main, vocational and maths and English qualifications) and 'other provision' (the rest) under the Learning and Skills Act



(Johnson 2000) the main objective being to herd non-participant adults towards these qualifications (or towards provision which supported progression directly to them) and to prioritise public funding for those qualifications which met the Act's criteria. To these ends, the QCF was necessarily established as a qualifications framework *first* which used credit as an organising principle in its design. Under the Act, qualifications were to remain the metric for calculating public funding and measuring the performance of FE providers and learners. Culturally, 'qualifications' still constituted 'achievement' and public funding of vocational education for eligible learners would primarily, continue to be aligned with that tradition.

In one sense, by the time the QCF was established ten years later, nothing much had changed. To suit its own purposes, Government had narrowly redefined Lifelong Learning and who should be publicly funded to receive it, and remoulded the concept of a credit framework as a qualifications framework, one which matched its objective to align public funding with its own redefinition of what constituted achievement.

This was a process where 'centring institutions' - Government and aligned institutions (Silverstein 1998: 404 cited in Blommaert 2005: 75), '[generated stratified] indexicalities<sup>8</sup> to which others [had] to orient', (Blommaert 2005: 75), articulated a set of values which created a new norm of what constituted Lifelong Learning and described who should receive public funding for it, and in doing so narrowed the potential discourse of adult learning reform hereon. The language of Lifelong Learning and learners was now stratified: ('qualifications' versus 'other'; 'vocational' versus 'non-vocational') and potential learners homogenised and negatively indexed as ('non-participants, 'without qualifications', 'disaffected youth', 'with literacy difficulties').

Blommaert (2005: 74) says, 'we have to conceive of indexicalities as organised in 'regimes' which invoke matters of ownership and control and allow and enable judgements, inclusion and exclusion, positive or negative sanctioning, and so forth.' From hereon, government power invoked ownership of the adult learning reform discourse described, establishing 'conventionalised patterns of indexicality' Blommaert (2005: 74) which narrowed and circumscribed what and who was included

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<sup>8</sup> Note: 'Apart from referential meaning, acts of communication produce indexical meaning: social meaning, interpretive leads between what is said and the social occasion in which it is being produced. Thus the word 'sir' not only refers to a male individual, but it indexes a particular social status and the role relationships of deference and politeness entailed by this status, and thus shapes indexical contrasts between 'sir' and other referentially cognate terms...' 'Indexical meaning is what anchors language usage firmly into social and cultural patterns.' (Blommaert 2005: 11, 12)

or excluded from the reform discourse and even how it would be conducted. This is significant for positioning the Public Works in that reform discourse and the positioning and operation of myself and others discourse subjects.

### **3.3 Low status of vocational learners and learning in England, then and now**

Given this negative and narrow positioning, it is questionable whether the adult learning reforms described did (or would have been able) to do much to raise the comparatively low status of vocational learning and learners in the UK (Unwin 2009), though re-examination of the Public Work report in Chapter 7 (Skills for Care 2013) suggests that at higher achievement levels, there is potential for change, however slow and erratic this may be.

The negative characterisation of vocational learners and learning had some important effects on how adult learning reform discourses were ordered by those with the power to shape, steer or make reforms, and how, during the course of implementation of the described reforms, the Public Works themselves were produced.

Fisher and Simmons' (2012) tour of the early history of Further Education in England makes dismal reading. From Balfour in 1902 to Leitch in 2006 the cry is substantially the same; 'we are behind our competitors', we face a 'lingering [economic] decline' (2012: 33). Once the English were afraid of German and French industrial competition, now it is India and China too. However Further Education in England has retained its low status, remaining local, for the poorer classes, while Higher Education has become internationalised through research and student migration. 'Elite' university graduates are still more desirable to employers than the FE vocationally qualified. (Hyland, Winch 2007). Characterising adult non-participants as victims of an inadequate system (Tight 1998: 483- 484), by association had negatively characterised vocational learning itself. But vocational learning was not viewed negatively everywhere. Seeing vocational learners as low-skilled, poorly qualified and socially excluded was and is, 'controversial especially in those countries with 'collective skill systems'' (Busemeyer and Trampusch 2011), 'such as Austria, Denmark, Germany, and Switzerland, where VET provides an attractive pathway, ensures low youth unemployment rates, and thus is by no means a source of marginalisation—quite the contrary.' (Powell, et al. 2012). There was some hope in the early 2000s that European policy developments might improve the status of vocational learning in the UK.

The Bologna Process and Copenhagen Agreement (Balzer, C., Rusconi, A. 2007) had presented high level coordinated policy goals for European lifelong learning to improve HE and VET (Vocational Education and Training) learning provision, for the sake of economic growth and sustainability across Europe. In a textual analysis of the two agreements, 'economic utility' and 'lifelong learning' topped the goals expressed (Powell, et al. 2012: 246) with 'quality assurance' the key 'legitimation' for improvements to VET. 'Credit Transfer', a key mobility goal for VET in the Copenhagen Agreement was prefigured in the establishment of credit frameworks across the UK (Powell, et al. 2012: 252), perhaps evidenced by the early documentation of the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF).

How far EU VET policy developments really impinged on or influenced development of the QCF is difficult to say. A briefing on credit framework developments across Europe was produced for QCA, well before the QCF was established (Lillis, Stott: 2005b) and found that UK practice was broadly 'in step' with developments across the EU. There was however no equation between establishing new qualification frameworks with credit transfer capabilities and improving UK attitudes to vocational learning. Across Europe, 'explicitly comparative research that systematically investigates both the sources and the consequences of these [Bologna and Copenhagen] parallel initiatives remains scarce' (Powell, et al. 2012: 241). Now, any hope that high level EU policy might improve the status of VET in the UK seems faint.

Wolf (2011) has, quite rightly, pointed to unfavourable international comparisons which afflict English vocational education. Its character and quality, especially in its non-advanced forms, however, says more about English cultural attitudes to the vocational than it does about the nature of vocational education per se. (Fisher and Simmons 2012: 47)

Patel (2012) suggests that even after the Wolf Report (2011), the focus would be on generation of increased apprenticeship places – with an emphasis on 'quantity not quality' - and that a lack of a clear purpose for vocational learning would persist: is an apprenticeship a 'second-chance' route for those who were unable to succeed academically? Is an apprenticeship meant to lead to and develop the high quality technical skills and knowledge learning needed for the UK to compete globally? Vocational learning teachers feel that government authorities and their systems are more concerned with centralised, homogenising attempts to measure their competence (Billet 2013) than raising the

status of vocational (alongside academic) learning and authorities and systems do not recognise the 'diversities of interests, intents and capacities of teachers and learners. A 'mature' system would allow teachers to adapt to local circumstances and diverse student learning needs and preferences.' Perhaps it would: if Government were clearer as to the purpose of vocational education, it might have more confidence in exactly what constituted its success.

It can be argued the UK was slow to respond to the post-war move from mass production to specialisation, suffering from its early and rapid (and by 1945, outdated) 19<sup>th</sup> century industrialisation and an entrenched class system; stuck as it was with notions of its greatness, too long accustomed to profits from its then disappearing empire. Fundamentally perhaps, 'the really important international comparisons are those of sociocultural attitudes to the vocational and, beyond those, to entrenched learning dispositions and economic inequalities arising from social class structures, as opposed to the quasi-bureaucratic and technical issues of how different educational systems organise and regulate their vocational education.' (Fisher and Simmons 2012: 47). Whatever the reasons were for the low status of vocational learning in the UK, the credit framework concept was, particularly in England, to be tied firmly to Government plans to improve qualifications systems and to make clear links, between adult learning reform, vocational qualifications and public funding.

### **3.4 The disjuncture between collaborative practice and coercive regulation**

There were earlier, different ideas about the reform of adult learning and the part credit might play in such a process; these predate the reports and legislation reviewed by Tight (1998) and are important for understanding how the Public Works were positioned later. From the early 1990s onwards, research was suggesting that credit could play a part in improving the 'accessibility, responsiveness and flexibility' of qualifications in reformed adult learning. The Further Education Unit (FEU) and its successor organisation, the Further Education Development Agency (FEDA) made a case for credit frameworks (FEU 1991, 1995a) and produced a series of guidelines on their construction and operation (1995b, 1995c). Others including Young (1993) made a connection between individuals in the future being able to exercise more control over what they learned (across institutional and other traditional boundaries), an entitlement to credit transfer and democratic rights. Credit frameworks, were they to operate across FE, HE and other divisions, might facilitate this.

Tight's review (1998) showed that some headline benefits of credit frameworks were repeated in reform discourses (Fryer 1997; Kennedy 1997; Dearing 1997) but *not* the details of their design or how to handle their operation, which were perhaps viewed as lower status, operational matters which would follow the centralised and centrally controlled reforms. There were to be consequences for this omission (or exclusion) which had later ramifications for the conduct and positioning of Public Works. One consequential example is set out here.

In one publication, FEDA (1995) gathered ideas and thinking from practice, from OCNs, from a 'Fforwm' of FE and HE practitioners in Wales and from a network of projects across London, setting out how practitioners could avoid one significant potential pitfall in designing and using credit frameworks. The pitfall, a failure to distinguish between 'units of assessment and modular learning programmes' could lead to the misunderstanding that in credit frameworks, 'the advantages and disadvantages of modular delivery [were] attributed to the process of unitising assessment and vice versa' (FEDA 1995: 3). FEDA provided a detailed explanation of how to correlate and separate the concept of 'module' and 'unit' in organising learning and assessment. Despite this advice and guidance, these same entangled attributions persisted and were carried forward all the way to the Wolf report (2011) which suggested that, 'QCF qualifications are broken down into separately assessed units' which 'imposes large costs in time and money spent assessing, recording, re-assessing etc.' (Wolf 2011: 88) repeating what by then had become an established misconception, that in the QCF, units were 'modules of delivery' which required individual and separate assessment. This misconception reflected, it might be assumed, responses to Wolf's consultation – a misinterpretation of QCF regulations from awarding organisations or possibly learning providers. This 'imposition' was nowhere present in QCF written regulations (Ofqual 2008).

I could speculate why this misconception had reached as far as the Wolf Report; perhaps that 'authentic' practitioner experience weighed heavier in this 'game of truth' than written regulation; that repeated practice in itself (of unnecessarily assessing achievement of each QCF unit) had established 'the truth' over written regulation; that the misconception confirmed other flaws identified in the qualification system and as such confirmed their truth; that the purpose of the exercise was to find evidence to confirm an already planned redirection in public policy. Or perhaps a combination of these, or none. There is however no doubt of the disjuncture. Lester (2011) identified what he sees as a number of specific flaws in QCF regulations and its limited 'capacity to

support innovation' (2011: 210-11) and suggested that 'the QCF imposes a set of design principles that will become increasingly restrictive and outdated as thinking on qualification design moves on' (2011: 213).

Lester provides an overview of Open College Network (OCN practice) and its influence on thinking and research at the Further Education Unit (FEU) and NIACE. OCNs, he says, placed 'credit rather than qualifications to the fore' (2011: 207) and points out that, 'The QCF as presently constructed has been designed around principles taken from adult further education which do not always sit easily with those used in schools or higher education' (2011: 209). The lack of articulation in the QCF with HE and school qualifications I suggest, had more to do with government policy than OCN credit principles designed into the QCF,

...successive governments have firmly resisted ongoing pressure to create a unified system of qualifications which attempt to bridge the academic-vocational divide. New Labour's rejection of the Tomlinson Report's (DfES 2004) recommendation that separate academic and vocational qualifications for young people should be abolished and replaced by a single, overarching 14-19 diploma encompassing both strands of learning is a notable recent example. (Fisher and Simpson 2012: 38)

However, there were no particular precedents for developing any credit –based qualifications within *regulated* qualification frameworks in the UK, until the advent of the QCF. The NQF (DFEE 1997) did not include any specific arrangements or requirements for the approval of credit-based qualifications. From their inception, both the SCQF (through a post hoc credit-rating process) (SCQF Partnership: 2003) and the CQFW were able to accommodate HE and school qualifications. Both were meta-frameworks operating collaboratively, rather than under regulation.

Credit based frameworks had developed in England along separate lines from Adult or Further Education, with Higher Education credit established through (successively) the Council for National Academic Awards (CNAA), the Open University and by 2008, the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ) and 'a national agreement on credit across HEIs in 2008' (Lester 2011: 206-207).

The QCF had been built on extensive but rather confined OCN credit principles developed and operated collaboratively in semi-autonomous (OCN) collegiate systems over almost 20 years and had included the development of Access to Higher Education programmes and their certification, which had involved extensive collaboration with universities in England and Wales (NOCN 2002; Peter Wilson 2010). Deep divisions between FE and HE lay elsewhere (Fisher and Simmons 2012: 34-37). OCN strength lay in practitioner ownership and control of its credit principles, rather than in government regulation. A 'strong' regulated qualifications framework did as Lester predicted, turn out to be 'brittle' in the end. The QCF was deregulated in 2015 (Ofqual 2015a).

### **3.5 Summary**

This chapter positions the selected Public Works along trajectories of thinking, research and government policy formation which variously controlled and contested the adult learning reforms described and points up some of the consequences; how in narrowing its characterisation of lifelong learning, government also narrowed what it saw as the purpose of credit frameworks, from the genesis of adult learning reforms described onwards.

The narrowing of lifelong learning (and its public funding) to low status vocational learning for negatively designated 'non-participant' learners (Tight 1998), reflected cultural and social divisions in England, about the value and purpose of vocational learning and who should undergo it (Fisher and Simmons 2012). Credit frameworks were believed to possess positive characteristics which then extant qualification systems lacked (Fryer 1997; Kennedy 1997; Dearing 1997) and the credit framework concept was tied to plans for the reforms of adult learning described (DFEE Learning Age 1998) (Lester 2011). QCF designers adapted OCN credit principles to construct a regulated qualifications framework (Ofqual 2008) and in doing so, perhaps lost one constituency of practitioners without gaining another; its imposition as a regulated framework losing the flexibility that operators of OCN credit frameworks had established in practice and owned, and as predicted, QCF 'brittleness' (Lester 2011) lead to its demise (Ofqual 2015a), the QCF having also been inextricably linked to the continuing failure of vocational education and judged to be part of the problem (Wolf 2011) - perhaps a machine that no one owned, with a manual which too few operators understood.

From the outset then, the adult learning reform discourse described was constrained by Government 'centering' control over that discourse, invoking ownership, and establishing 'conventionalised patterns of indexicality' Blommaert (2005: 74) which narrowed and circumscribed what and who was included or excluded: '...these documents typically start by asserting – without evidence in a taken-for-granted fashion – the critical importance of lifelong learning for the economy' (Tight 1998: 482); with Government objects aligned with the producers of three key 'consultative' reports including already planned Government policy initiatives (Tight 1998: 481).

This is the context in which the Public Works were positioned and produced. Ever conscious of the direction of government policy, their commissioning was subject to the centripetal forces of institutional authority; whether the Public Works managed to nudge reform policy discourse along a slightly different arc (Lillis, Sparrow 2003), or test the feasibility of its objects (Lillis, Stott 2009), or exemplify what might be possible were policy to be more ambitious (Skills for Care 2013), government (not simply the state but the institutions and individuals in its centering orbit) controlled the Public Work discourses and those subjects positioned within them. A question for subsequent Public Work recontextualisation is the degree to which I, as the practitioner-researcher subject (and other subjects) were able to operate creatively within government constraints, whether there was value in that creativity and if so, what that value was.



## **Chapter 4 The Rewards of Recognition: the value of NOCN Accreditation, Quality Assurance and Development for Non-Accredited Learning, NIACE 2003.**

### **4.1 Introduction**

This Public Work analysed Local Education Authority (LEA) (and other) Open College Network (OCN) accreditation practices across England and made conditional recommendations for its wider use to recognise individual achievements and for quality assuring 'non-accredited' LEA 'Adult and Community Learning' (ACL) in England.

'Non-accredited' or 'unaccredited' learning may have been accredited – but not recognised within the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) for England, Wales and Northern Ireland and so was regarded, under the Learning and Skills Act 2000, as 'other' (i.e. without a 'qualification' outcome) under the Act. 'ACL' was a category of Learning and Skills Council (LSC) funded learning provision used mainly by Local Education Authorities at this time. In 2014-15 'non-regulated provision' (Skills Funding Agency 2014) would theoretically include LEA ACL, though how much of the ACL provision researched then, would still be eligible for public funding now, is doubtful.

I was a practitioner when assigned to the Public Work research project, developing NOCN qualifications for the NQF and coordinating work on systematising practice across what were 28 OCNs in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. I was however, also engaged from my beginnings at NOCN in 2000 in connecting NOCN to the reform of Adult Learning taking place in England and Wales (NOCN 2002). I had some research experience but I was not employed as a researcher. The Public Work project presented an opportunity; there were resources to employ an experienced research assistant (my co-researcher) and I could develop new research skills.

Recontextualisation uses a KPS analysis (explained in Chapter 2) to triangulate the operation of knowledge, power and subjectivity in production of the Public Work discourse and how this constrained and directed discourses in conducting the research and producing the Public Work report.

## 4.2 Context

With preparations for reform of vocational learning and qualifications about to get underway from 2004, the Local Government Association (LGA) and NIACE wanted to provide evidence of the value of ACL to the LSC, the planning and funding government agency for all non-university, post-compulsory adult learning provision. ACL achievements did not count as or contribute to NQF qualifications and though publicly funded through the LSC, ACL provision was judged by NIACE and others to be more vulnerable to redirection of public funding away from ACL towards politically more secure 'accredited' learning provision which lead to the achievement of NQF qualifications. In 2001, the National Open College Network (NOCN) had suggested that a study of the value of OCN accreditation and quality assurance of non-accredited learning might help NIACE to raise awareness of its value in the Learning and Skills Council (LSC), given the extent to which OCN accreditation was being used by Local Authorities in England – as well as by other 'adult learning providers' often unfunded by the LSC – to recognise a wider variety of adult learning achievements.

In the second half of 2002 NIACE (with LGA) support) commissioned NOCN to undertake this Public Work. I was responsible for managing and conducting the research and acted as lead writer of the final research report. My co-researcher concentrated on collecting data and analysing responses to a LEFEA (Local Education Authorities Forum for the Education of Adults) survey. The rationale for this research was thus driven by a NIACE motivation to provide evidence to support protection of public funding for and practice in ACL, particularly among its constituency of LEAs. NIACE saw OCN accreditation (under the banner of NOCN, the then national network organisation for OCNs) as perhaps the 'least worst' way to demonstrate that there were tangible individual learning outcomes and social benefits from ACL, that could theoretically aid progression to NQF qualifications (and some external quality assurance of provision), helping to substantiate a case for continued public funding.

The report described and analysed OCN accreditation practice in LEAs and other settings across England. The research also identified how the introduction of OCN accreditation practices would require 'capacity building' of LEA staff to succeed consistently across LEA learning provision and recommended some actions to address this. The research report findings demonstrated the potential value of OCN accredited ACL for supporting progression into vocational learning and NQF qualifications and that there were other social and economic benefits for individuals and social

groups. It also presented NIACE and its own discourse community with a dichotomy; adopting OCN accreditation practice could provide evidence to government of the value of ACL but it could bureaucratise a system that was already under-resourced, and be used to restrict ACL to the pursuit of those outcomes that the state judged to be of value. NIACE did however trust the OCN movement and was a longstanding supporter.

NIACE combines a long standing admiration for the role NOCN has played in keeping adult learning opportunities - not least in local authority contexts - and progression routes open with a multi-faceted interest in how learners' journeys, and their achievements en route can be mapped. This study addresses both concerns. For far too long the formal qualifications system has focused on mechanisms to monitor achievement by young learners, and has applied them to adults. The prospect now for a unit-based credit framework fit for purpose for adult learners, as suggested in the Skills Strategy is encouraging - though it will be essential to ensure that policies lead on to adult sensitive practice. The practices reported here will provide a useful benchmark to test the emerging framework against.

Alan Tuckett, Director, NIACE (Lillis, Sparrow 2003: 2)

The founding philosophy of (NIACE) had been a belief in the value of adult learning for personal and social improvement, and a 20<sup>th</sup> century history of defending (and re-stating) claims for the value of 'Adult Learning' within the discourse communities of 'non-accredited, non-vocational' adult learning practitioners and its supporters (NIACE 2015). The Public Work report revealed that LEA ACL practice and discourse communities were not collectively reconciled to any 'consensual imposition' regarding OCN (or any other) mechanisms for recognising and measuring individual learning achievement, or other value (Lillis, Sparrow 2003: 42). A number of practical obstacles would the research found, have to be overcome, should the use of any such mechanism be encouraged or imposed.

The Public Work research investigated a proposed LSC process for recognising and recording progress (RARPA) in ACL (LSC 2003) which emulated the OCN programme development and approval process, though in much less detail. The 'RARPA process' appeared to address the concerns of LEA managers (Lillis, Sparrow 2003: 39-46) and was subsequently adopted and used by LSC. A version of RARPA remains in place today, its use conditional for 'non-regulated' SFA funding (Skills Funding Agency 2014).

The capacity or otherwise of LEAs to manage the OCN accreditation system was a less significant issue I would now contend, than whether ACL provision, and what it was then understood to encompass, had any future as government funded provision at all. The Public Work report discourse confirmed that the ACL 'adult learning for its own sake' discourse community was likely to be excluded from adult learning reform discourses, as it could or would not engage with the discourse of vocational qualifications, *the* government metric for measuring achievement and prioritising public funding for adult learning. This exclusion from the reform discourse did not protect ACL from the ever narrowing descriptions of what constituted publicly funded lifelong learning, however. ACL was to be confined to provision for adults with learning disabilities and difficulties, and to provision for designated non-participant groups which demonstrably led to approved vocational qualifications. Whether there were to be accredited outcomes for individuals or not, ACL was to become heavily restricted to provision which met approved government requirements (Skills Funding Agency 2014).

LSC was more interested in the application of credit for recognising learning achievements for entry into or within the workplace, and commissioned in parallel to this Public Work, a study into the potential of credit for Entry to Employment, Modern Apprenticeships and the applicability of credit for work based learning (Lillis, Gillard 2004).

LSC had been remitted by the Secretary of State (Lillis, Gillard 2004: 4) to explore how credit could be used to measure (and fund) learning outcomes and the quality of provision of adult learning in and for the workplace, some of which in 2003 lay outside the NQF (LSC 2003; Lillis, Gillard 2004). The position was to evolve radically and very quickly; within four years the QCF, a credit based qualifications framework, was to replace the NQF as the regulatory framework for national vocational qualifications and preparatory qualifications for work.

NOCN used the opportunity presented by the Public Work (Lillis, Sparrow 2003) to produce evidence to legitimise claims for the value of OCN accreditation practice for recognising 'non-accredited learning' achievements *beyond* the confines of LSC funded ACL. The research explored practices with people aged over 16 in youth services, community work and in the recognition of group or collective achievement (Lillis, Sparrow: 56-59); practices that extended well beyond LEA ACL but did appear to

reach those non-participants in adult learning designated by Government as targets for involvement (LSC 2003).

These other accreditation practices often operated outside the NIACE/LEA ACL discourse community; were funded through other central and local government sources and through charities; operated in separate discourse communities whose primary purpose may not have been 'adult learning', often working in financially precarious circumstances. Their willingness to engage with OCN accreditation was I would suggest, driven in part by their prior exclusion or separation from discourses in adult learning; inclusion in the Public Work they believed, might secure recognition of the value of their practices more widely and perhaps also within the Government controlled discourse community of adult learning reform, improving potential access to future funding by (different departments of) government, the national lottery, or the European Social Fund. There was more than one ethical objective in play in this PW.

#### **4.3 Exclusion, silences and the exercise of power**

The operation of government power (the state, its agents and dependent institutions) through creation of the Learning and Skills Act<sup>9</sup> (DFEE 2000) controlled the discourse of described adult learning reform, by first framing a government concept of 'qualification', then operating an exclusion, remaining silent about learning provision that did not lead to these 'external, approved' qualifications.

This had the effect of separating the discourses of 'external, approved' qualifications from those concerning 'other provision'. Sections 96-98 of the Act supported funding of 'external, [and] approved qualifications', i.e., 'those authenticated by an outside person' [further defined] and 'approved' by the state or its designates. 'Other provision' – i.e. any other learning provision for adults aged 19+, including provision later termed 'non-accredited' was not referenced in the Act. There was no indication in the Act of how non/un-accredited provision would be approved for LSC funding. The negative status of 'non' or 'un' inside 'other provision' reinforced its *otherness*, undefined and as such unprotected, vulnerable to exclusion.

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<sup>9</sup> NOTE: Although sections of the Learning and Skills Act applied to England and or Wales, LSC's responsibilities extended to England only.

The effect of this exclusion on the Public Work was for NOCN to argue for *inclusion* of a wider range of OCN accredited Adult Learning, *in addition to* LEA ACL provision, in the Public Work research, in the hope that it might too be protected and count as admissible, LSC funded ‘other’ provision.

**Table 1** summarises the results of recontextualisation of this Public Work, using the ‘triangulated’ approach outlined in Chapter 2. The KPS analysis reveals how Techniques of Government were used to control the Public Work discourse and how individualising practices began to divide potential alignments among these knowledge fellowships engaged in ‘non-accredited’ learning.

What I would now describe as a lack of cohesion (Halliday, Hasan 1976: 198, Fairclough, 1992:83<sup>10</sup>) in key Government texts, discussed in the Public Work report, ‘[inhibited] proper public debate and discussion of issues and ideas relating to recognition of achievement.’ (Lillis, Sparrow 2003: 18-22). This was a Government attempt to produce a ‘stratification of [indexical] value’ (Blommaert 2005: 223) of the terms ‘qualifications’, ‘accreditation’, ‘awards’ and ‘high quality rigorous study’ across different ministerial texts, with little success, unless of course the aim was to generate confusion and diffuse opposition to Government policy. Referring to this issue in the Public Work Report was contentious in itself and NIACE asked that NOCN ‘own’ that chapter. The question of how written texts were being used to order and control discourses by those in power was of more interest to me.

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<sup>10</sup> ‘A coherent text is one whose constituent parts are meaningfully related so that the text as a whole makes sense even without a lot of reference markers’ (Fairclough, 1992:83).

Table 1 <sup>11</sup>

<b><i>The Rewards of Recognition: the value of NOCN Accreditation, Quality Assurance and Development for Non-Accredited Learning (Lillis, Sparrow 2003)</i></b>		
<b>Techniques of Discourse (K)</b>	<b>Techniques of Government (P)</b>	<b>Techniques of Self (S)</b>
<p><i>Internal rules of discourse</i> exercised control, shaped and influenced the conduct and outcome of the Public Work through: <i>(K-K) Repetition</i> Power ‘in and behind discourse’ – government language of legislation and exclusions (Learning and Skills Act 2000); interpretation controlled through ministerial remits and through guidance issued or controlled by its agents and interpreters.</p> <p><i>(K-K)</i> Attempt by NIACE to seek demarcation in systems for recognising the achievements of respectively (undifferentiated) ‘adults’ and ‘young people’.</p> <p><i>(K-K)</i> creation and repetition of terms used to demarcate non-</p>	<p><i>(P-P) Ordering of forces</i> Government desire to measure the learning achievements of individuals and the primacy of the regulated NQF for this purpose.</p> <p>The creation of the Learning and Skills Act 2000 to control and discipline the flow of funding and support to Adult Learning provision.</p> <p><i>(P-P)</i> Government demand or desire to measure the performance and achievements of, among others, education providers, youth workers and regeneration managers.</p> <p><i>(P-P)</i> A desire to offer an</p>	<p><i>(S-S) Modes of subjectivation</i></p> <p><i>Agency:</i> Acting as and on behalf of NOCN in conducting and using its agency to extend the research to non-accredited learning provision beyond ACL to gain authority as a practitioner-researcher; examination of ‘Group credit’ and introduction of other non-ACL practices; critique of the quality of ACL communities of practice and the ACL discourse community.</p> <p><i>(P-S)</i> – Subject’s use and promotion to government of OCN accreditation for <i>moral objects</i> – the</p>

<sup>11</sup> The three corners of the Foucauldian triangle are examined separately: Techniques of Discourse (K); Techniques of Government (P) Techniques of Self (S). Each of these techniques is further divided into further elementary relational particles constructed through reading [of the Public Work], combining dimensions of Knowledge (K), Subjectivity (S) and Power (P), for example ‘(P-K) Disciplining practices’ or ‘(S-P) Art of Governmentality’ (paraphrasing Heikkinen, et al. 1999: 142). Note that each column reads down but not across.

***The Rewards of Recognition: the value of NOCN Accreditation, Quality Assurance and Development for Non-Accredited Learning (Lillis, Sparrow 2003)***

Techniques of Discourse (K)	Techniques of Government (P)	Techniques of Self (S)
<p>accredited ACL and other ‘other provision’ in the discourse of adult learning reform, particularly:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Accredited (approved, external) qualifications versus non/un-accredited learning</li> <li>• Outcomes of learning versus learning outcomes</li> <li>• Social outcomes versus learning outcomes</li> <li>• Measurability versus the recognition of the personal value of learning</li> <li>• Progression towards achievement of approved qualifications versus personal progression towards individual goals</li> </ul> <p><i>(K-K-S) Individuality and the ‘I’</i> Adoption of ‘I’ (as practitioner-researcher) to unify writings, to attempt to attract disparate participants in the Public Work to the ACL discourse.</p>	<p>inclusive curriculum to designated segments of the population judged ‘disadvantaged and excluded’ for the sake of social cohesion and/or improved economic performance.</p> <p><i>(P-P)</i> The demand to prove public money is being spent appropriately.</p> <p><i>(P-K) Disciplining practices</i> Content and context of the research ordered and initially limited by the client to LEA ACL provision</p> <p>Practitioner-researcher subject agency used to extend the research to include non ACL non-accredited learning in post 16 youth services, community work and recognition of collective (group) achievement.</p> <p><i>(P-K)</i> The emerging primacy in Adult Learning reform plans of</p>	<p>inclusion of excluded people’s learning and valuing their unrecognised achievements.</p> <p><i>The practitioner as ethical subject:</i> the promotion of OCN accreditation for moral objects – gathering examples of practice ‘from the wild’ to ‘authenticate’ claims for the potential of OCN accreditation practice to foster learner ownership and control of learning among those with little experience of agency in their education.</p> <p><i>(S-P) Art of Governmentality</i> ‘mastery of norms’ Creating a space within the research to subject the discourse of Adult Learning reform to critical scrutiny; juxtaposing different practices in non-accredited</p>



***The Rewards of Recognition: the value of NOCN Accreditation, Quality Assurance and Development for Non-Accredited Learning (Lillis, Sparrow 2003)***

Techniques of Discourse (K)	Techniques of Government (P)	Techniques of Self (S)
<p><i>(K-K-S) [Multiple] fellowships of discourse</i></p> <p>A diversity of fellowships competing or aligning to exercise agency, particularly:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• NIACE AND LGA</li> <li>• Youth Service and community work practitioners</li> <li>• adult learning reform discourse community (the state and its agents or advocates)</li> </ul> <p>And an absence of a ‘common language’ and cohesion in key written texts leading to disputed interpretation of terms in characterising the outcomes of learning across and among these fellowships.</p> <p><i>(K-P) Exclusion</i></p> <p>Appropriation (to centring institutions) of discourse for the purposes of demarcation and or differentiation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adult / Young</li> <li>• Outcome /achievement</li> <li>• Qualification/accreditation</li> </ul>	<p>government-defined literacy and numeracy skills and prescribed qualifications in the Government’s adult learning strategy.</p> <p><i>(P-K-S) Examination</i></p> <p>Promotion by the practitioner-researcher subject of assessment practices that do not rely on end-testing and examination.</p> <p>Case study evidence from communities of practice to challenge Government <i>and</i> client’s perception of whose and what achievements can be recognised and how.</p> <p><i>(P-S) Individualising practices</i></p> <p>Competition between (national and local) government funded knowledge fellowships and their associated practice communities, for public funding of other, non/un-</p>	<p>learning to reveal disparities in and to extend and critique the institutional rules of discourse in which they operate.</p> <p>Developing awareness of how to work within, analyse and respond to the ordering of forces in managing the conduct of and extending the scope of the research; using discourse analysis to ask new questions about the written texts in discourse itself, to gain power and direct others.</p> <p>Drawing agency from more than one source to exercise power in conduct and completion of the research, for example, operating as ‘NOCN’ in critiquing of Government language.</p> <p><i>Confession</i></p> <p>To gain some agency as a subject constituted within</p>

***The Rewards of Recognition: the value of NOCN Accreditation, Quality Assurance and Development for Non-Accredited Learning (Lillis, Sparrow 2003)***

Techniques of Discourse (K)	Techniques of Government (P)	Techniques of Self (S)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Qualifications/other provision</li> <li>• External assessment/recognition of achievement</li> <li>• Credit/qualification</li> <li>• Qualification/high quality rigorous study</li> <li>• Quality assurance/external evaluation</li> <li>• Accreditation/ recognition and confirmation of value</li> </ul> <p><i>(K-P) Control of and meaning-making in written texts</i></p> <p>The effect of contested language on discourse of adult learning reform and on the research itself, in particular:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Qualification</li> <li>• Accreditation</li> <li>• Accredited learning</li> <li>• Non-accredited learning</li> <li>• External</li> <li>• Approved</li> <li>• Adult</li> <li>• Young</li> </ul>	<p>accredited learning provision.</p> <p><i>(P-S)</i> Government controlled qualification systems: control over who can award (externality) and selective government controlled approval of qualifications that can be added to the list (NQF) and publicly funded.</p> <p><i>(P-S)</i> The primacy of Government Basic Skills Pedagogy and Assessment.</p> <p><i>(P-S)</i> Accreditation body internal systems for recognising and quality assuring Adult Learning provision and individual achievements.</p> <p><i>(P-S)</i> ACL learning providers - exercising power through allocation of money and tangible assets, fulfilment of their moral and political objectives, and the variations</p>	<p>another: Conscious adoption of 'I' – use of the first person singular and plural throughout.</p>

***The Rewards of Recognition: the value of NOCN Accreditation, Quality Assurance and Development for Non-Accredited Learning (Lillis, Sparrow 2003)***

Techniques of Discourse (K)	Techniques of Government (P)	Techniques of Self (S)
<p>The absence of a mutually understood language to describe success criteria for measuring or acknowledging the value of personal gains considered crucial to the success of public social policy.</p>	<p>in practices between these among learning providers.</p> <p>(P-S) Learners lacking agency in exercise of authority or control over systems for recognising their achievements.</p> <p><i>(P-S-S) Pastoral power</i></p> <p>The integration of individuals' learning into state control through inclusion in systems for recognising their achievements.</p>	

NOTE: The 'KPS' sub-category terms italicised in the table above (*'Internal rules of discourse'*, etc.) are all drawn from Heikkinen, et al. 1999.

**4.4 Reflections – constraints and creativity in a crowded space**

NIACE had hoped the Public Work might help reverse polarity of the A(C)L reform discourse, suggesting OCN (ACL) practices reported in the Public Work report should be used and perhaps elevated as 'benchmarks', against which the 'emerging framework' [of qualifications and credit] would be tested, for its suitability for adult learners (Lillis, Sparrow 2003: 2). The Public Work was unlikely to achieve this, given how Government had oriented the adult reform discourse described.

Re-reading and reconsidering this Public Work, and KPS analysis of the Public Work texts (**Table 1**) reawakened the lived experience of conducting the Public Work research, positioned as I was among

the institutional subjectivities of NIACE, NOCN, other uncoordinated adult learning providers with little influence, and the LSC, all in their sometimes congruent and sometimes contested subject positions. The Public Work was commissioned by NIACE to stake a claim for LEA provided ACL, for the claim it could fill some of the vacuum left by the Learning and Skills Act 2000, to fill the empty silence of undefined 'other [adult learning] provision' alongside the solid presence of approved qualifications. This exclusion acted as a constraint and at the same time opened up a creative space to explore through the Public Work how the 'other' vacuum might be filled. Competing (and intersecting) knowledge fellowships contested this space, each attempting to exercise their authority over knowledge (what constituted 'otherness') through the fellowships and constituencies they controlled or served.

The NIACE claim (on behalf of and as an advocate of LEA ACL providers) was for a particular form of adult learning provision described in the Public Work text. NOCN wanted to demonstrate the efficacy of its accreditation and other quality mark (assurance) practices (Lillis, Sparrow 2003: 52-56) for ACL *and* to find a place in 'other provision' for a much wider range of other 'unaccredited provision', including learning that lay outside LSC funded LEA ACL, some of which competed with it for attention in the Public Work report (Lillis, Sparrow 2003: 30-38).

LSC had provided and asked for responses through the Public Work to its outlined RARPA process (LSC 2003) which emulated and at the same time threatened to compete with OCN accreditation and quality assurance services (Lillis, Sparrow 2003: 52-56) and though learners said they were in favour of assessment for credit 'as long as there were no tests or exams' (Lillis, Sparrow 2003: 45), LEA managers were uncertain about (OCN or other) assessment and wary of external scrutiny (Lillis, Sparrow 2003: 42) – RARPA seemed simpler and was preferred by many. The RARPA 'five principles' were used to 'record' rather than 'reward' learners' achievements, with the recording process remaining in the control of ACL providers themselves.

The Public Work report is located in and examined alongside extant published literature (Lillis, Sparrow 2003: 23-38) which reported 'the concern of many practitioners engaged in liberal adult education: accreditation seems to confer value, and non-accredited learning needs a system which gives learners such recognition and confirmation of value' (Watters, Turner 2001). McGivney (2002) asked what constituted 'progression', learning 'achievements', and 'outcomes' and suggested that

‘...some key dimensions of learning may get lost in favour of technical mechanisms for measuring outcomes and progression’ (McGivney 2002: 37). This anxiety reflected responses by LEA ACL managers and practitioners in the Public Work to whether or not OCN (or any other) accreditation practice was suitable for ACL, though the precariousness of ACL provision left little time for this discussion. Limitations of time acted as a further constraint on creativity in the Public Work discourse.

‘In valuing achievement there is a need to recognise collective learning gains and reward them and to develop an approach that captures the wider benefits of learning over time.’ (Schuller, et al. 2002; Schuller 2004 cited in Lillis, Sparrow 2003: 28). A detailed case study of an OCN project which attempted to do just this was examined in the Public Work report (Lillis, Sparrow 2003: 56-59). Though this example was judged outside the boundary of ‘otherness’ for the research commissioners and certainly the LSC, its (contested) inclusion in the Public Work report had at least two effects: the extension of the Public Work discourse to include knowledge outside ACL discourses served to legitimise LEA ACL practices at the centre, where the rules of ACL discourse were reactivated and repeated, making such practices appear professional, safe, controlled, ordered; and conversely, showed that it was possible for me to challenge powerful fellowships of discourse and their knowledge doctrines, and how to hold at least temporary control of the unifying authorial principle in negotiating what would or should be included in the published Public Work report – the tangible material product of the Public Work discourse.

What is clear in re-reading the Public Work now is that the ACL community itself was not universally aligned in its framing of ACL knowledge and practice; that meaning-making in written texts within the ACL discourse was sometimes disputed or remained unresolved; that there was not a universal willingness to be included in or subject to OCN accreditation practice; that use of OCN accreditation for any measurement of the quality of ACL might constrain or exclude practices that its members considered to be of value; that any subscription to OCN accreditation would require practitioners to experience some ‘capacity building’ (possibly changes in pedagogical practice, assimilation into an accreditation regime, a loss of agency and authority) to succeed consistently across LEA learning provision and there were limited resources and appetite for this.

In contrast, those Adult Learning practice communities in young adult youth work or community work that had in the past been excluded from ACL and had not been subject to the constraints of LSC funding (and therefore the Act) saw OCN accreditation as perhaps a means of having the value of their pedagogy recognised and importantly, funded by the LSC. Case study examples in the Public Work showed how OCN accreditation could make this practice visible (and perhaps legitimised and valued), providing learners with tradable assets in the form of credit. These were the hopes of these practice communities (and mine, as the practitioner-researcher), that in participating in the Public Work discourse they might gain entry to fellowships from which they were excluded, or that in becoming visible their knowledge fellowships might be recognised by those that controlled and ordered adult learning reform discourse.

The Public Work discourse was heavily circumscribed by the government's policy discourse on Adult Literacy (Lillis, Sparrow 2003: 14-15) 'where [in ACL researched] basic skills' practitioners continued to complain that their experience of 'what worked' was at serious odds with the Government's definition of what counted.' 31% of LEA ACL providers used OCN accreditation to recognise basic skills achievements (Lillis, Sparrow 2003: 77). The government's policy declaration on 'basic skills' signalled that Government valued (and would prioritise public investment in) its own particular pedagogy and system for recognising achievements in literacy and numeracy. Though ACL and other Adult Learning non/un-accredited practice communities might value and speak about other forms of knowledge, or claim their practices developed adults' literacy and numeracy in diverse ways, 'basic skills' pedagogy and assessment was to be heavily circumscribed by government regulation. There is an irony here: the introduction of a national scheme for basic skills learning and accreditation subsumed what may have been successful ACL basis skills practice into the general class of failure of publicly funded education to reach and teach 7 million adults basic skills; state *control* of basic skills discourse seemed more important.

#### **4.5 Uncertainty, subjectivity and my emerging practitioner-researcher identity**

Clearly, there were subjectivities other than my own at play in this Public Work. NIACE and NOCN were superficially aligned against the Government position on the value of provision leading to NQF qualifications over other forms of adult learning and accreditation, but legislation had been passed, lifelong learning and who should be publicly funded to pursue it had been narrowly circumscribed and stratified. Each institution looked to the Public Work report to substantiate its position and to

suggest the practice each advocated was suitable to fill much of the 'other provision' vacuum discussed.

Other subjectivities (LEA ACL managers, ACL tutors, community and youth work organisations) were far removed from the centralising authority of government, or the centering control and influence of the national institutions supporting the research, and had little or no agency in the operation of the adult learning reform discourse, beyond that which might be exercised through very limited participation in the Public Work itself – though representations of their practice in the Public Work report were oriented to respond to the pull of government power.

This experience had several unanticipated effects on my practice. It was difficult to find and hold onto space to operate creatively as the Public Work progressed. At the outset, I had not anticipated how contested ACL and accreditation practice would be, which was sometimes difficult as the research progressed and my colleague and I collected and analysed data, knowing it might in itself be contested. As an NOCN employee it was difficult to operate anywhere other than where I was positioned in the institutional hierarchy, which in turn positioned me relatively to all other institutional representatives at NIACE. I could be reminded by the paying client where I stood hierarchically, should it be judged that was needed.

However, I had by the time the report was published, begun to understand how a *researcher* subject identity might enable me to exercise a degree of authority over the conduct of the Public Work and production of the report. Being a *researcher* allowed me to perform what Blommaert and others call a 'scale jump' – 'moving from the local and situated to the translocal and 'general', invoking practices that have validity beyond the here-and-now – normative validity.' (Blommaert 2006: 5), invocations that elevate the discourse (and with it, the speaker) higher up the scale and perhaps temporarily out of reach. 'Outscaling' (Uitemark 2002) is a 'frequent power tactic: lifting a particular issue to a scale-level which is inaccessible to the other'. As Blommaert states, 'complex semiotic transformations' are made in the process but for now, I had begun to learn that as a researcher I could 'scale jump' by invoking normativity from empirical research results, and the researcher subject identity would allow me to do so.

#### **4.6 Post-script on the unexpected impact of the Public Work**

In parallel to this Public Work project, I was engaged in EU funded work to support the establishment of an OCN type organisation in Sweden (Svensson 2006). The Public Work report was used to examine and share UK OCN concepts and practice (Svensson O., Lillis, F., Stott, C. 2006) lead to the adaptation and use of these practices post-compulsory education in Sweden (Berglund 2010). This was not the last time that practice and research within one localised area was (unintentionally) to reach and influence the discourse of another.

#### **4.7 Summary**

NIACE (with Local Government Association (LGA) support) commissioned NOCN to undertake a study of the value of OCN accreditation and quality assurance for non-accredited learning, to support protection of public funding for and practice in ACL, particularly among its constituency of LEAs. NIACE was a longstanding supporter of the OCN movement. The Public Work demonstrated the potential value of OCN accredited ACL for supporting progression into accredited vocational learning and qualifications and that there were other social and economic benefits for individuals and social groups.

The operation of government power through creation of the Learning and Skills Act 2000 controlled the Public Work discourse, first framing a government concept of 'qualification', then operating an exclusion, remaining silent about learning provision that did not lead to these 'external, approved' qualifications, referring only to such provision as 'other', opening up the discourse as to what could be considered as 'other provision' to sometimes unaligned discourse communities, beyond those seeking to protect LEA ACL provision.

While Adult Learning 'other provision' was contestable, 'basic skills' pedagogy and assessment was to be heavily circumscribed by government regulation. Despite providing evidence of successful practice in 'basis skills' in ACL and other pedagogic practice the Public Work had almost no effect on the government position in England, on adult literacy and numeracy pedagogy and assessment.

The Public Work report uncovered the contestability of what constituted ACL and what should be funded under the category of 'other' adult learning provision.



There were subjectivities other than my own at play in this Public Work. NIACE and NOCN were superficially aligned against the Government position on the value of provision leading to NQF qualifications over other forms of adult learning and accreditation but legislation had been passed, lifelong learning and who should be publicly funded to pursue it had been narrowly circumscribed and stratified. Each institution looked to the Public Work report to substantiate its position and to suggest the practice each advocated was suitable to fill much of the 'other provision' vacuum discussed.

Learning how subjecting myself to the rules of the game – and how to operate creatively within those rules - allowed me to 'unfold [a little] space [to find] new ways to ask questions', (Heikinenn, et al. 2012: 149) even questions that other subjects in the discourse might prefer were not asked in the Public Work.

Being a *researcher* allowed me to perform what Blommaert and others call a 'scale jump' – 'moving from the local and situated to the translocal and 'general', invoking practices that have validity beyond the here-and-now – normative validity.' (Blommaert 2006: 5), invocations that elevate the discourse (and with it, the speaker) higher up the scale and perhaps temporarily out of reach. The Public Work report was used to examine and share UK OCN concepts and practice, and led to their adaptation in Sweden (Svensson, Lillis, Stott 2006; Svensson, Tideman 2007; Svensson 2008a, 2008b; Berglund 2010) to form new networks and develop a Scandinavian 'OCN' model. Here was a case of practice and research within one localised area and one set of intentions, reaching and influencing the discourse of another.

## **Chapter 5 Learning from experience – implementing credit: A Comparative Analysis of Awarding Body Credit Practice within the Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales. Federation of Awarding Bodies, 2005.**

### **5.1 Introduction and context**

Credit Works was commissioned by the Federation of Awarding Bodies (FAB) to conduct this Public Work, produce an evaluative report and write guidance for the Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales (CQFW) on assigning credit to qualifications. These were key expected outcomes from a multifaceted project sponsored by the CQFW with the support of ESF funding. This Public Work presented an opportunity for our new consultancy, Credit Works, to see if it could influence the emerging reform of the qualifications system in Wales.

The CQFW was intended to be a meta-framework, encompassing all publicly funded qualifications that are offered in Wales at all levels. The notion of ‘national’ began to be contended in Education as devolution in Scotland and Wales took hold in the early years of this century and both the Welsh Assembly and Scottish Government exercised their authority in the area of publicly funded learning and qualifications. Scotland had formally established the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) in 2001. Both the SCQF and CQFW encompass all qualifications offered in each country (including university qualifications) and their operation has depended upon collaboration across interest groups, rather than regulation, to function.

Credit Works spent almost two years delivering ‘capacity building’ activities for all Federation of Awarding Bodies (FAB) members - and five major awarding bodies in particular. I was lead report writer and manager for the FAB CQFW project.

In the past awarding bodies have had limited experience of building credit into their qualifications, and the project has allowed a range of awarding bodies to ‘learn by doing’ and thus to develop their understanding of credit; what is described in this report as their “credit sense”. (Lillis, Stott 2005a: 3)

...people in the organisation now know about credit – there is less concern about its introduction and less anxiety about managing it...The project has helped us prepare for the demands of reform. (City & Guilds) (Lillis, Stott 2005a: 4)

I had led for NOCN on the development of the ‘Common Accord’ (Welsh Government 2015) for the CQFW from 2000-2003, approved by the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) in 2003 (Welsh Government 2015), leading to the WAG supported ESF project approved in late 2003 (Lillis, Stott: 7). This Public Work was the first longer term Credit Works’ capacity building project – and we were tasked to concurrently analyse and evaluate its effectiveness. I had the opportunity to develop a deeper understanding of how Awarding Organisations<sup>12</sup> (AOs) worked as businesses; to explore in confidential sessions the challenges that the reform programme posed for them, collectively and individually. I was able to test adult learning reform ideas and develop expertise in applying them before the reform of the qualifications system had begun in England. This experience proved invaluable as reform of the English led qualifications system for England, Wales and Northern Ireland got underway.

The CQFW predated QCF development led by LSC and QCA in England in 2006<sup>13</sup>. This project had a major impact on participating Awarding Organisations, giving them time to explore ways in which credit might be used to adapt and improve their qualifications, extending to testing the use of credit for the design of school (GCSE and ‘A’ level) qualifications. The FAB CQFW project was financially well supported and above all, there was room for collaboration, persuasion and learning by doing. This was to contrast with the subsequent development of the QCF in England where development was most often led from and driven by centering institutions (see Chapter 6).

## **5.2 Awarding organisations in England and Wales: power from the state**

Awarding Organisations are perhaps unique to the countries of the UK. ‘We have yet to identify a country, other than England, that operates a model of multiple competing awarding bodies.’<sup>14</sup> (Wellcome Trust 2012). This situation has attracted interest in debates over multiple AOs and ‘school examinations’ for 15-19 year olds, with arguments made for reform (Kelly 2014; Wellcome Trust

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<sup>12</sup> NOTE: Awarding Bodies were renamed ‘Organisations’ under QCF regulations (Ofqual 2008) and are referred to as ‘Awarding Organisations’ here and throughout.

<sup>13</sup> A credit framework concept was the subject of public consultation in 2004-5 (QCA 2004). Named the ‘Framework for Achievement’, it predated the establishment of QCF but never became operational under that name.

<sup>14</sup> ‘England’ may be taken to refer here to the UK as a whole, as the situation described applied to all UK countries.

2012; SCORE 2012) and against (Croft, Spread 2012). Many more AOs – including those offering school examinations - are engaged in the business of vocational qualifications.

In England, AOs and their qualifications are approved by the state regulator, Ofqual. Ofqual approved qualifications are (selectively), subject to further approval by the Skills Funding Agency in England and used in formulae to calculate the public funding of most learning provision for adults, outside Universities. A similar qualification metric is used to calculate the funding of Adult Learning provision in Wales (National Assembly for Wales 2015). Little research has been done into the ‘marketisation’ of Awarding Organisations (Kelly 2014: 44) but confusion over questions of the effects of competition, suggested collusion and proliferation remains, with Wolf (2011) appearing to take the view that in England, more (qualifications, choice) would be better for the market (in vocational education) by increasing competition, though there is no logical reason why that would improve its effectiveness (Kelly 2014: 47). The recent establishment of a qualifications regulator with the additional power to decide which qualifications will be designated for use and public funding in Wales (National Assembly for Wales 2015), contrasts with the openly competitive position maintained in England.

This debate continued after production of the Public Work, about the relative power and commercial positions of Awarding Organisations in publicly funded adult learning. Only in Wales is there now a serious attempt to shift the old order by authorising its regulator to select qualifications for public funding (Welsh Assembly Government 2015), though qualifications remain at the heart of policy and systems for funding in both countries. The exercise of AO power, derived from and directly controlled by the state through regulation and funding, is the subject of KPS analysis (**Table 2**) and some reflections.

### **5.3 Ordering of forces in establishing the CQFW**

The Public Work report details how AOs acquired and used ‘credit sense’ in this capacity building project, testing their skills by assigning credit to a range of their existing qualifications, having had no experience or skills in being able to do so at the outset. The project had introduced a completely new system for the design of qualifications; a system that applied (Credit Works’) knowledge and skills from practice, introducing a system for qualification design which was relatively unknown to the most powerful AOs in the UK, each of which had participated in the project.

The Public Work report was used to provide guidance on a range of complex design questions, including APL, credit transfer and exemption, the grading of achievement and the potential application of credit for General Qualifications (GCSEs and A levels).

The acquisition of knowledge was thus concentrated within one (new) community of practice. The wider discourse community engaged in the establishment of the CQFW, including regulators and representatives of the CQFW project, listened to but did not participate in the acquisition *through practice* of this new 'credit sense', but benefited from the Public Work results; the production of credible guidance consensually generated and owned by the community of practice established by the Public Work, guidance that was used to establish operation of the CQFW.

Without the cooperation of AOs, the CQFW could have remained an aspiration. AOs were central to the operation and control of publicly funded qualifications in the UK outside universities, and qualifications were and are the linchpin of the system which publicly funds Adult Learning provision. As AOs gained credit expertise however, there were a number of effects on the exercise of power in this new discourse and on credit practices, concentrated as the new practice and expertise was (by the time of the Public Work's completion) almost wholly in the staff and organisations of the participating AOs.

The Public Work project created a new community of practice, in itself exclusive to Awarding Organisations and Credit Works which communicated its actions through control of spoken and written discourses used to selectively distil and control the flow outwards, of knowledge emanating from this strand of the whole ESF project.

**Table 2** provides a KPS analysis derived from the Public Work report, signals where power resided in conduct of the Public Work and orders the relationships between domination, discipline and control within the discourse community engaged in the implementation of the CQFW.

Table 2<sup>15</sup>

Learning from experience – implementing credit: A Comparative Analysis of Awarding Body Credit Practice within the Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales. Federation of Awarding Bodies, 2005.		
Techniques of Discourse (K)	Techniques of Government (P)	Techniques of Self (S)
<p>How <i>internal rules of discourse</i> exercised control, shaped and influence the conduct and outcome of the Public Work through:</p> <p><i>Creation of a fellowship of discourse (K-K-S)</i></p> <p>Using practitioner acquired knowledge to create a new AO dominated fellowship of knowledge, formed from practice; fulfilling desire for this knowledge among AOs to gain and extend the agency and authority of individuals and their organisations.</p> <p>Attempts to replicate practice from outside the laboratory, to test knowledge and ideas contained in practice for</p>	<p><i>(P-S)</i> The practitioner-researcher desire to influence and gain power for <i>moral objects</i></p> <p>Establishing a knowledge fellowship to build expertise and mutual trust; investing expertise in AOs to achieve moral objects: the generation of knowledge from practice to foster ownership and control of discourse; establishing a practice and discourse community capable of challenging the centering forces of adult learning reform (to come) in England.</p> <p>Gain of agency within government as practitioner-researcher; beginning to compromise ethical goals to achieve moral objects in this process.</p> <p><i>(P-P) Ordering of forces</i></p> <p>Understanding where power resided in establishment of the CQFW, and able to operate and shift subject position in response to the ordering of domination, discipline and control. Using the Public Work to gain agency by association with AOs who were able to dominate the wider discourse fellowship</p>	<p><i>(S-S) Modes of subjectivation</i></p> <p>Further transition from practitioner (Lillis, Sparrow 2003) to independent practitioner-researcher, gaining agency and authority.</p> <p>Becoming an expert - the credible insider (practitioner) becoming researcher – invited into institutional fellowships of discourse; Being paid; establishing Credit Works as a business.</p> <p><i>(S-P) Art of Governmentality, mastery of norms</i></p> <p>Understanding how power relationships operated for this Public Work - being governed by the major AOs within FAB and the CQFW project discourse community and learning how to control the flow of knowledge to counter exercise of</p>

<sup>15</sup> The three corners of the Foucauldian triangle are examined separately: Techniques of Discourse (K); Techniques of Government (P) Techniques of Self (S). Each of these techniques is further divided into further elementary relational particles constructed through reading [of the Public Work], combining dimensions of Knowledge (K), Subjectivity (S) and Power (P), for example '(P-K) Disciplining practices' or '(S-P) Art of Governmentality' (paraphrasing Heikkinen, et al. 1999: 142). Note that each column reads down but not across.

**Learning from experience – implementing credit: A Comparative Analysis of Awarding Body Credit Practice within the Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales. Federation of Awarding Bodies, 2005.**

Techniques of Discourse (K)	Techniques of Government (P)	Techniques of Self (S)
<p>application inside the publicly funded Adult Learning system; and how to codify such application.</p> <p><i>(K-P) Exclusion</i></p> <p>Each member of the AO fellowship limited public access (through the Public Work report) to learning it decided it would share; reserving its sharing of further knowledge gained, in order to protect its commercial interests and power.</p>	<p>through acquisition of new knowledge and rarefaction of the rules of that discourse.</p> <p>The enactment into exploratory practice of the Welsh Assembly Government commitment to a credit framework for all; the codification of that framework and...</p> <p>...the influence of this discourse on the emerging credit based qualification system for England, Wales and Northern Ireland.</p> <p><i>(P-S) Individualising practices</i></p> <p>How government authority (WAG, institutions in its control, individuals) centred control within (competing AOs) positioned by <i>authorities</i>, through public funding mechanisms dependent upon AO qualifications.</p>	<p>government power. Adopting the technique of sharing knowledge through practice to gain power and direct others.</p> <p><i>(S-K) Will to knowledge</i></p> <p>Transition from unconscious to self-conscious awareness as practitioner – researcher in the establishment of a new practice and discourse community, as a knowing subject, responding to the desire for new knowledge and authority.</p>

NOTE: The ‘KPS’ sub-category terms italicised in the table above (*‘Internal rules of discourse’*, etc.) are all drawn from Heikkinen, et al. 1999.

**5.4 Reflections**

One striking impression in re-reading the report is how (usually competing) Awarding Organisations managed to cooperate to centre control of discourse and practice in their own interests so successfully and still achieve what the ESF project had expected of this strand of work. Detailed evidence of this can be found in the evaluation of the whole ESF project (Welsh Assembly Government 2008), which judged the Public Work to have ‘fully achieved’ its objectives, contrasting with the planned outcomes of most other strands which were either ‘partially achieved’, or were ‘not evidenced’ to the evaluators.

It was in the interests of AOs to cooperate; by completion of the Public Work, other work to scope the potential application of credit in England (LSC 2003) (Lillis, Gillard 2004) was having an impact and AOs were aware they would need credit expertise to succeed in the much larger English qualifications market. In forming an expert fellowship, participating major AOs improved their commercial chances, and control of the discourse over their smaller competitors in FAB membership and over the 'English Government', which though intent on a regulated framework in control of its regulator, the QCA, still had limited access to accreditation knowledge and practice. This Public Work had put AOs ahead.

The 'Credit Works' subject identity was established through the conduct of this Public Work. There were several important effects; the brand became known among participating AOs, the wider FAB membership and among those with authority over qualifications and adult learning in Wales. Credit Works had already started working for LSC. The knowledge we had gained in testing and developing our expertise from practice gave us an additional commercial advantage of our own. A new dynamic had also emerged; in producing the first selected Public Work (Lillis, Sparrow 2003) I had operated as a practitioner and researcher inside the NOCN subjectivity when necessary. In the production of this Public Work, my co-researcher and I could co-identify as Credit Works, and operating as such increased our strength and reduced our individual vulnerability. We had created another separate subject identity, itself a creative space in which we could both operate under our own internal rules of discourse. Blommaert offers another rationale for Credit Works' new mobility. 'The capacity to jump scales has a silencing effect on the other, who is outscaled. This is why we do not often talk back when our bosses scold us, and this is why in contemporary corporate culture, consultants ('experts') are called in to take the hard decisions.' (Blommaert 2006: 8)

## **5.5 Summary**

Credit Works was commissioned by the Federation of Awarding Bodies (FAB) to conduct this Public Work, produce an evaluative report and to produce written guidance for the Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales (CQFW) on assigning credit to qualifications. This Public Work presented an opportunity for our new consultancy, Credit Works, to see if it could influence the emerging reform of the qualifications system in Wales.



Credit Works spent almost two years delivering 'capacity building' activities for all Federation of Awarding Bodies (FAB) members - and five major awarding bodies in particular. Awarding Organisations managed to cooperate to centre control of discourse and practice in their own interests successfully and still achieve what the ESF project had expected of this strand of work. Detailed evidence of this can be found in the evaluation of the whole ESF project (Welsh Assembly Government 2008), which judged the Public Work to have 'fully achieved' its objectives.

It was in the interests of AOs to cooperate; by completion of the Public Work, impact of work to scope the application of credit in England (LSC 2003) (Lillis, Gillard 2004) was being felt, and AOs were aware they would need credit expertise to succeed in the much larger English qualifications market.

The 'Credit Works' subject identity was established through the conduct of this Public Work. There were several important effects; the brand became known among participating AOs, the wider FAB membership and among those with authority over qualifications and adult learning in Wales. Credit Works had already started working for LSC. A new dynamic had also emerged; in the production of this Public Work, my co-researcher and I could co-identify as Credit Works, and operating as such increased our strength and reduced our vulnerability – we had created another separate subject identity.

## **Chapter 6 Final report on the support and capacity building programme for UK Sector Skills Councils and Standard Setting Bodies, for the development of units and qualifications as part of the VQ reform programme (including QCF) and the alignment of priority qualifications with public funding. Credit Works, 2009.**

### **6.1 Introduction and context**

This Public Work report (Credit Works 2009) describes and analyses the Credit Works' programme of training and support for 22 Sector Skills Councils and Standard Setting Bodies (Credit Works 2009: 6), both referred to here as Sector Bodies (SBs) provided between 2008-9. The programme focused on support for the development of units and 'priority' vocational qualifications for the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF), as part of the then Vocational Qualifications Reform Programme (LSC 2007), and the 'alignment' of these priority vocational qualifications with systems for public funding of Adult Learning in England.

By 2007, QCA had issued what were effectively working regulations for the QCF (QCA: 2007: 4-5). Our task in this Public Work, commissioned and managed by LSC but with the support and direct involvement of QCA, was to develop a methodology that SBs could use (and control) to develop their understanding and ability to interpret QCF working regulations and enable them to design QCF units and qualifications with employers. Some SBs were more successful than others in achieving what was required and the report analysis explores why, and identifies other issues that emerged from the project.

Two new methods were developed in this Public Work: a *Process Map* – a method produced by Credit Works intended to help SBs 'get the best' from the QCF, by creating a sector relevant framework of QCF units that could be used to get from National Occupational Standards (or any other reference point) to a sector relevant framework of QCF units, pathways and qualifications (Credit Works 2009: 11-20); new guidance for SBs and AOs on assigning credit and level to units of QCF qualifications was also produced and included as an Appendix (Credit Works 2009: 36-46). Workshops on how to use the Process Map and the guidance on assigning credit and level were provided for SBs. The Public Work programme also included guidance on using rules of combination

(RoC) to support qualification purposes, Credit Accumulation and Transfer (CAT) and writing QCF units.

The project developed the capacity of 22 SBs to understand and develop credit based qualifications and alongside other activities, enabled SBs and AOs to populate the QCF with qualifications and establish the QCF as a viable Framework.

At the beginning of 2008 there were relatively few QCF units and qualifications ready for approval for inclusion in the QCF. By 2010 several thousand QCF units and sets of qualifications had been developed for each sector and were approved for inclusion in the QCF by Ofqual (Ofqual 2011). Credit Works adapted the collaborative approach taken with AOs in the FAB CQFW project (Lillis, Stott 2005a), despite the 'top down' introduction of the QCF as a regulated qualifications framework. Our approach was to ask SBs to self-assess and then adapt their expertise and experience to the demands of a credit system, clarifying and refining (their and our) conceptual understanding, practice and use of core language as we went along.

This approach was generally welcomed and indirect government funding was also available to SBs to assist them in implementing these reforms<sup>16</sup>. A small minority of SBs decided their strategy was to passively resist the reform, possibly in the hope that the *status quo ante* might prevail. Our response to resistance was to follow the approach we had taken in all Public Works conducted throughout the QCF 'tests and trials' period (2006-2008): concentrate support and effort where SBs were willing to cooperate. This final Credit Works' project in a series, was targeted at those SBs that had not yet developed priority qualifications by 2008. When LSC suggested in 2008 that funding for non-QCF qualifications might be 'switched off' in 2010, all SBs eventually complied, meeting at least minimum LSC requirements by 2010.

A number of 'discussion points' in the Public Work report were specifically included for Ofqual and Ofqual guidance was issued on titling qualifications and new rules on defining their purpose. (Credit Works 2009: 35).

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<sup>16</sup> This funding was channelled through the Sector Skills Development Agency (SSDA) and its successor body, the The UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UKCES), though the governmental remit and authority for establishing the QCF on the terms described, remained with LSC and QCA (LSC 2007).

There is 'no knowledge which does not pre-suppose' power relations (Foucault 1975: 27) and its generation and dissemination is dependent upon the interactions between forces that exercise power in discourse and practice communities. This Public Work was subject to a continuous shift in the ordering of forces, among those within bureaucracies seeking to exercise control of the discourse (primarily LSC and QCA) and between and among those who were subject to that control (SBs, AOs and Credit Works). Power was not however concentrated solely in the pursuit of a set of relational objectives designed to create a new 'inclusive' qualifications framework but exercised by different forces of authority, to enact a series of interlocked adult learning reform goals (Credit Works 2009: 4; LSC 2007), creating shifting alignments and oppositions within and across the discourse communities who would need to be engaged willingly or otherwise, to enact these reforms.

The KPS analysis in **Table 3** illustrates how government authority (the state and its agents) exercised control of discourses in this Public Work, repeating a belief in the efficacy of the QCF for reform of vocational qualifications, (Ofqual 2007) creating and controlling use of new language to describe and regulate the QCF, and operating exclusions to attempt to centre government authority in SBs (Ofqual 2007: 4-5) and prioritise efforts to achieve policy objectives in England and, through alignment of qualifications development with public funding mechanisms for England, attempting I suggest, to prioritise policy and public funding reform objectives for England over any that obtained in Wales or might have obtained in Northern Ireland. **Table 3** illustrates how practitioner-researcher and other subjectivities were controlled by government forces and how subjects were positioned to operate within these constraints.

Table 3<sup>17</sup>

Getting the best from the QCF: Final report on the support and capacity building programme for UK Sector Skills Councils and Standard Setting Bodies, for the development of units and qualifications as part of the VQ reform programme (including QCF) and the alignment of priority qualifications with public funding.		
Techniques of Discourse (K)	Techniques of Government (P)	Techniques of Self (S)
<p>'Internal rules of discourse' exercised control, shaped and influenced the conduct and outcome of this Public Work through:</p> <p><i>(K-K) Repetition</i></p> <p>A (repeated) belief in the efficacy of the QCF to address the consequences of perceived failures in the existing NQF qualifications framework; claiming in QCF 'tests and trials' (2006-2008) and then repeating in regulation that the QCF would be: 'inclusive, responsive, accessible, [and] non-bureaucratic' (Ofqual 2008).</p> <p>New knowledge (new language) introduced and</p>	<p><i>(P-S) The practitioner-researcher</i> desire to influence and gain power for <i>moral objects</i></p> <p>Creation of space inside a coercive discourse to operate;</p> <p>Validating SB knowledge in creation of new discourses in qualification design and offering control to SBs and their constituents, attempting to promote practitioner-researcher ethical goals in the process.</p> <p><i>(P-P) Ordering of forces</i></p> <p>Relative power positions of QCA, DCELLS<sup>18</sup> and CEA<sup>19</sup>, LSC SBs and AOs in controlling the discourse of QCF implementation and shifting practices in qualification design.</p>	<p><i>(S-S) Modes of subjectivation</i></p> <p>After becoming a visible expert during the FAB/CQFW project (Chapter 4); adopting the role of visible expert practitioner-researcher in implementation of this Public Work, writing new core language in interpreting QCF regulations and writing guidance on its use.</p> <p><i>(S-P) Art of Governmentality</i></p> <p>Operating under the authority of government and as its visible agents; seeking collaboration with subjects (SBs) under the coercive control of government; gaining agency through increased expertise in application of credit practice across a range of sectors; using the authority of expertise and experience to direct or persuade</p>

<sup>17</sup> The three corners of the Foucauldian triangle are examined separately: Techniques of Discourse (K); Techniques of Government (P) Techniques of Self (S). Each of these techniques is further divided into further elementary relational particles constructed through reading [of the Public Work], combining dimensions of Knowledge (K), Subjectivity (S) and Power (P), for example '(P-K) Disciplining practices' or '(S-P) Art of Governmentality' (paraphrasing Heikkinen, et al. 1999: 142). *Note that each column reads down but not across.*

<sup>18</sup> Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills, (DCELLS) Welsh Assembly Government.

<sup>19</sup> Council for the Curriculum, Examinations & Assessment (CCEA) advises the Department of Education (NI) or The Minister for Education (Northern Ireland Assembly) on the accreditation of curriculum and qualifications.

Getting the best from the QCF: Final report on the support and capacity building programme for UK Sector Skills Councils and Standard Setting Bodies, for the development of units and qualifications as part of the VQ reform programme (including QCF) and the alignment of priority qualifications with public funding.		
Techniques of Discourse (K)	Techniques of Government (P)	Techniques of Self (S)
<p>repeated in discourse to describe, codify and regulate qualifications.</p> <p><i>Fellowship of discourse(K-K-S)</i></p> <p>QCA control and ownership of the discourse of QCF regulation (with the complicity or subjugation of qualification regulatory and advisory bodies in Wales and Northern Ireland respectively).</p> <p>LSC ownership and control of the discourse of reformed public funding of QCF qualifications in England.</p> <p>Government attempts to centralise power in SBs by investing in their knowledge development and assigning authority to them in qualifications development and approval.</p> <p>SB discourse and practice communities' ownership and control of the institutional knowledge within each of the</p>	<p>LSC interest (and resources for capacity building) exclusive to England; yet the QCF was to be implemented in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.</p> <p><i>(P-K) Disciplining practices</i></p> <p>The operation of discipline by each institution through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Government authority (QCA, LSC and SBs)</li> <li>• Control of regulation (QCA)</li> <li>• Control of public funding (LSC)</li> <li>• Control of knowledge of credit practice (Credit Works)</li> </ul> <p><i>Control and discipline</i> of discourse was subject to each institution's will to exercise authority.</p> <p><i>(P-K-S) Examination</i></p> <p>A belief that reform of systems which examine the acquisition of knowledge and skills and mechanisms for its public funding would produce desired changes in culture and practice in vocational</p>	<p>those in overall control of implementing the QCF.</p> <p>Inclusion in each fellowship of discourse meant:</p> <p>Acting explicitly on behalf of government agencies in authority;</p> <p>Acting complicitly with SBs within a space created to transfer and create new knowledge;</p> <p>Operating within and contributing to the codification of new knowledge intended to dominate others;</p> <p>Operating within the codified QCF to 'organise and instrumentalise' (Foucault 1984: 19) and be subject to forces both controlling the discourse of reform and those obliged to operate within that discourse.</p> <p><i>Confession</i></p> <p>Production of the <i>Process Map</i> authenticated through use by SBs in (self) examination of their current institutional knowledge; and subjecting their discourse fellowship to self-examination;</p>

Getting the best from the QCF: Final report on the support and capacity building programme for UK Sector Skills Councils and Standard Setting Bodies, for the development of units and qualifications as part of the VQ reform programme (including QCF) and the alignment of priority qualifications with public funding.		
Techniques of Discourse (K)	Techniques of Government (P)	Techniques of Self (S)
<p>22 sectors; control and codification of sector occupational roles and cross-occupational functions in National Occupational Standards.</p> <p><i>(K-P) Exclusion</i></p> <p>The early codification of the untested QCF by QCA through a set of ‘working’ and then enforceable legal regulations, used to circumscribe and enforce the QCF, served to exclude some pre-existing practices and language in (vocational) qualification design.</p> <p>In creating a new language of qualification design, obliging an existing speech community to acquire and use that new language.</p> <p>Effective exclusion of learning providers and potential or actual learners from the development of ‘priority’ qualifications for the QCF.</p>	<p>learning provision and improve its economic efficacy.</p> <p><i>(P-S) Individualising practices</i></p> <p>Individual control was exercised through individuals within institutions positioned by government (SBs, Credit Works) or individuals directly controlled by government</p>	<p>contributing to the knowledge owned and controlled by each SB</p> <p>fellowship and authenticating new knowledge for the wider discourse</p> <p>fellowship of adult learning reform.</p> <p><i>(S-K) Will to knowledge</i></p> <p>Contribution to the codification of credit practice through production of guidance and tools for using the QCF; changes in final version of QCF regulations resulted from the Public Work.</p>

Getting the best from the QCF: Final report on the support and capacity building programme for UK Sector Skills Councils and Standard Setting Bodies, for the development of units and qualifications as part of the VQ reform programme (including QCF) and the alignment of priority qualifications with public funding.		
Techniques of Discourse (K)	Techniques of Government (P)	Techniques of Self (S)
<p>Pre-existing knowledge of credit practice centred in AOs; yet authority for approval of QCF qualifications centred in SBs.</p> <p>'Priority' qualifications developed for alignment with public funding mechanisms and their reform in England; qualifications approved for use in England for use in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.</p>		

NOTE: The 'KPS' sub-category terms italicised in the table above (*'Internal rules of discourse'*, etc.) are all drawn from Heikkinen, et al. 1999.

## 6.2 Colonised institutions and discourse technologies in the exercise of control of Public Work discourse

Political authority operates through colonisation of institutions and their discourses by the state (Habermas 1987). Subjects in social discourse may operate creatively within these constraints (Fairclough 2014: 69); this is explored briefly in the section below.

The Public Work discourse was 'colonised' by what Fairclough calls 'a [particular] discourse type' (Fairclough 2014: 86-9) – in this case the discourse of [a] bureaucracy which orientated the discourse towards 'its instrumental goals' i.e. producing acquiescent SBs which prioritised and approved an 'aligned' set of QCF qualifications for public funding, Fairclough calling such a colonising discourse 'following Habermas, an example of a *strategic* discourse.' (2014: 201). Citing consumerism and



bureaucracy as examples of colonising discourse types, Fairclough is principally concerned with the effects of such discourse colonisation on individuals.

However in this Public Work, the principal target for colonisation were SBs, the strategic discourse controlled and disciplined through two visible institutions (LSC and QCA) operating within and disciplined by political authority (usually invisible), each charged with the enactment of one or more specific VQ reform objectives, sometimes explicit and aligned across policies and institutions, as the Public Work title suggests, and sometimes hidden; for example, the subordination of AO authority to that of SBs, giving the latter the final say (approval) over the inclusion of 'sector qualifications' in the QCF, (Ofqual 2007: 3-4) and by default, linking such qualifications to public funding.<sup>20</sup> The operation of each colonising institution, each with its own centre of authority and its own priorities, placed them dialectically in tension, if not necessarily in opposition; QCA had control of qualifications regulation, LSC the mechanisms of public funding. Types of what are termed 'discourse technologies' (Fairclough 2014: 212) or text 'genres' (Lillis 2013b: 68-70) in written forms, were used to harmonise and coordinate efforts between the colonising institutions, firstly aiming to persuade - the publication of ideas for discussion, the subsequent operation of controlled, instrumental forms of written 'consultation' - moving on to enactment and coercion through written regulation, of qualifications and public funding.

The control of discourse *description* through codified regulation *and* discourse *interpretation* through production of written guidance using for example, branded guidance packs and animated texts on free USB memory sticks (QCDA 2010), was central to a harmonised control of the Public Work discourse between the visible state institutions. While SBs were expected to derive their legitimacy and authenticity from employer representation, their existence and survival depended upon state authority, and as such they operated as colonised institutions, subject to and under the hierarchical control of state bureaucracies. Discourse technologies were used to exercise control over SBs and indirectly but powerfully over AOs, to instrumentalise a chain of policy objectives.

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<sup>20</sup> NOTE: One government policy push collided with another at this point: that SBs and not AOs should drive the design of 'priority' vocational qualifications, the former deriving their constituency and power from employers in their sector (LSC 2009). SBs' authority to act in this way was restricted however, constituted and funded as they mostly were, by government. Major AOs had developed credit expertise through the FAB CQFW project (Chapter 5) but were not directly called upon (or publicly funded) to use this expertise to lead development of 'priority' qualifications for the QCF, other than through a relationship which subordinated their authority to individual SBs.

Adult Learning providers and learners were effectively excluded from but subject to the outcomes of this process.

### **6.3 Constraint and creativity in subjects positioned in the Public Work discourse**

Operating as a practitioner-researcher in this Public Work was complex and heavily constrained, by the forces I have described and an awareness of the increasing dominance of a higher rationally driven political objective of reducing spending on adult learning, diminishing by the year. Wolf's historic analysis of 'Adult Skills' spending (2015) tells this story well.

From the Public Work report, this project could appear to have been a mainly technical exercise: building SB capacity, getting QCF qualifications designed and into the system, launching the QCF. There was little space for the expression of possibility *in writing* as discourses of adult learning reform moved from exploration to a narrow focus on the creation of 'priority qualifications' under a set of QCF regulations. Yet there was space to operate creatively in conduct of the work.

We were able to test concepts and try new approaches, adapt our understanding from working with SBs to analyse their practice, work with SBs to overcome resistance or technical difficulties and in doing so extended our and their understanding. The Process Map (Credit Works 2009: 11-20) was a discourse tool; intended to enable employers to be included in the discourses of qualification design and gain agency in that discourse. This practice reflected earlier community work approaches which sought to include and offer control of OCN credit practice to community members, in an imaginative space, within the rules of discourse.

Credit Works encouraged and facilitated SBs in learning from each other and we learned from them, operating as we were, inside an order of discourse controlled from the centre, through institutions responsible for qualification regulation and their public funding. There were as I suggested earlier, a range of responses to the Public Work. We concentrated time and effort on the most responsive SBs – those who used the creative space to find ways to think differently – whatever the policy intentions – and who did so purposefully and imaginatively. This enabled Credit Works to operate creatively, and to model (and test) new ways of designing qualifications, sharing these methods in the Public Work report.

Persuasion and coercion did however operate simultaneously. Credit Works was morally and practically committed to persuade; but as knowing subjects positioned by agents of government, we and SBs positioned in the Public Work discourse were conscious throughout of its power to coerce. Reviewing the Public Work and report now, it seems that the less persuasion required, the more productive and imaginative the response from SBs. Where there was resistance, the coercive effects of new qualifications and funding regulations - and a deadline - lead to minimum compliance. This Public Work operated in a complex and largely closed field of significant and influential political activity and this recontextualisation necessarily brief as it is, suggests one area for further detailed analysis, that of power relations in the discourse of current Apprenticeship reforms in England, which I have outlined in Chapter 8.

#### **6.4 Summary**

This Public Work report (Credit Works 2009) describes and analyses the Credit Works' programme of training and support for 22 Sector Skills Councils and Standard Setting Bodies (SBs) (Credit Works 2009: 6), between 2008-9. The programme focused on support for the development of units and 'priority' vocational qualifications for the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF), as part of the then Vocational Qualifications Reform Programme (LSC 2007), and the 'alignment' of these priority vocational qualifications with systems for public funding of Adult Learning in England. Two new methods were developed in this Public Work: a *Process Map* – a method produced by Credit Works for creating a sector relevant framework of QCF units that could be used to get from National Occupational Standards (or any other reference point) to a sector relevant framework of QCF units, pathways and qualifications (Credit Works 2009: 11-20); and new guidance for SBs and AOs on assigning credit and level to units of QCF qualifications, produced and included as an Appendix (Credit Works 2009: 36-46).

The project developed the capacity of 22 SBs to understand and develop credit based qualifications and alongside other activities, enabled SBs and AOs to populate the QCF with qualifications and establish the QCF as a viable Framework.

The Public Work discourse was 'colonised' by what Fairclough calls 'a [particular] discourse type' (Fairclough 2014: 86-9) – in this case the discourse of [a] bureaucracy which orientated the discourse towards 'its instrumental goals' i.e. aiming to produce acquiescent SBs which prioritised and

approved an 'aligned' set of QCF qualifications for public funding. Types of what are termed 'discourse technologies'<sup>21</sup> (Fairclough 2014: 212) or text 'genres' (Lillis 2013b: 68-70) in written forms, were used to harmonise and coordinate efforts between the colonising institutions, firstly aiming to persuade - the publication of ideas for discussion, the subsequent operation of controlled, instrumental forms of written 'consultation' - moving on to enactment and coercion through written regulation, of qualifications and public funding.

The Process Map (Credit Works 2009: 11-20) was a discourse tool; intended to enable employers to be included in the discourses of qualification design, and gain agency, recognition and some control over the products of discourse technologies deployed by government. This practice reflected earlier community work approaches which sought to include and offer control of OCN credit practice to community members, in an imaginative space, within the rules of discourse.

Operating as a practitioner-researcher in this Public Work was complex and heavily constrained, yet there was space to operate creatively in conduct of the work. Persuasion and coercion did however operate simultaneously. Credit Works was morally and practically committed to persuade; but as knowing subjects positioned by agents of government, we and SBs positioned in the Public Work discourse were conscious throughout of its power to coerce.

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<sup>21</sup> 'What I have in mind are types of discourse such as interviews, official forms, questionnaires, tests...medical examinations, lessons, which are themselves the subject of social scientific investigation and where the results of this investigation are fed back into discourse technologies, helping to shape and modify them.' (Fairclough 2014: 212). Whereas, 'In the study of non-literary texts, a key distinction is often made between the use of genre to refer to types of *texts* or types of *activity*'. (Lillis 2013b: 68-70).

## **Chapter 7 New routes into university for people working in adult social care. Skills for Care, 2013**

### **7.1 Introduction and context**

This Public Work report (Skills for Care 2013) describes progress in development of a project to design new routes into university for people working as managers and specialists in Adult Social Care, a sector that had little tradition of engagement with HE.

The Public Work project designed and put in place a 'Specialist Pathway' within a Skills for Care Higher Apprenticeship Framework in Care Leadership and Management (England), where 80 credits from specified Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) level 5 Diplomas in Adult Social Care counted directly towards specified University Diplomas at Level 5 (Skills for Care 2015a). The Public Work report (Skills for Care 2013) explains how the Higher Apprenticeship Framework 'Specialist Pathway' was designed, how Skills for Care worked with FE and HE providers and social care employers to create the Pathway and what the project hoped to do next.

This was an innovation in Higher Apprenticeship development, creating a national scheme with multiple HEIs, to accept under a standard national arrangement, credit from the QCF as having equal value in FHEQ qualifications, opening up routes into university for experienced social care managers. The Public Work also opened up another possibility; that learning in Adult Social Care did not have to be reductive and instrumental - an opportunity to push against the 'low-skilled, low status labelling' (Unwin 2009) of vocational learning in the sector and where vocational learning might lead.

The project began with 3 HEIs in 2012 and 6 FHEQ qualifications were designed and validated by universities for the Higher Apprenticeship (HA) Specialist Pathway by March 2013. (Skills for Care 2013: 4) All university qualifications included the university validated 'exemption' arrangement. The first cohort of learners progressed through to HE at Middlesex University in 2014. By November 2015, 40% of all HAs in England were in Care Leadership and Management, all having the option to progress directly to university (Skills for Care 2015b).

Local schemes using, for example, different approaches to Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) and exemption, were in place prior to the development of the HA. These did not explicitly recognise the value of QCF diplomas in health and social care, with the exception of a Middlesex University

programme which had created its own scheme to recognise the value of QCF credit from QCF Diplomas in Health and Social Care within a Foundation Degree (FD). Researching RPL in 2011, I found no evidence of any other HEIs attempting to do the same (Lillis 2011). The step between a QCF Diploma and Foundation Degree was in any case perhaps a step too far (from 80 to 240 credits), perhaps too expensive and too much of a commitment for social care managers learning at work, and 'Health and Social Care' FDs on offer did not stand as professional qualifications in Social Care (Skills for Care: 12-13). The HA pathway designed for this Public Work provided a shorter step: 80 QCF credits were recognised as equivalent in value to 80 FHEQ credits within a 120 credit level 5 University Higher Diploma *and* included a QCF qualification which attested to the achiever's occupational competence as a Social Care manager. Middlesex University took the lead on this development, encouraging other HEIs to follow (Skills for Care 2013: 8, Bravenboer and Workman 2015). The Public Work project created a national scheme and a 'specification' to be used by any interested Higher Education Institution (HEI) in England. The specification detailed requirements and parameters for HEIs developing Specialist Pathway options in the HA (Skills for Care 2013: 15-20). Credit Transfer between FE and HE was in the air (BIS 2011c) and higher vocational education was to be opened up to competition (BIS 2011b). At a launch conference, The Secretary of State for Business Innovation and Skills said, 'We've got to be much more flexible and... the qualifications earned on apprenticeship have to be transferable into a university level HE qualification - and I think this is happening in the social care sector and that's a big step forward.' (Nylon Walnut 2012). For new recruits to the social care sector, the potential to eventually progress into Higher Education from achievement of Apprenticeship qualifications at levels 2 and 3 could now be visible (and possible) from the start of their career.

Working as Project Manager for Skills for Care, I worked with Skills for Care and HE colleagues to design and put in place the Specialist Pathway specification, oversee implementation of the project, write the Public Work progress report (Skills for Care 2013) and produce a set of films used to promote the HA Specialist Pathway to Social Care employers and managers (Nylon Walnut 2013) and contribute to the Public Work project concurrent evaluation.

This Public Work presented an opportunity to attempt to innovate, combining expertise gained through practice and acquired in conducting research, a chance to apply some of the detailed accumulated technical knowledge I had gained through earlier Public Works, working directly on this

Public Work project with practitioners in vocational learning and higher education, across institutional boundaries, on behalf of an employer network. Skills for Care was receptive to new ideas and I was, within the constraints I describe below, trusted to develop the specification – the Specialist Pathway model – in collaboration with the HEIs interested in participating.

Skills for Care accepted my proposal that we concurrently evaluate the Public Work project. This had a number of benefits including; responding to employers, HEIs, FE providers and Skills for Care itself, asking for the production of Public Work impact evidence as the project progressed; being able to share draft text and the draft report with those participating, to seek their views and their corroboration of the concepts and practice contained in the report: the production of text with its materiality, its portability (Latour 1987) and mobility (Brandt, Clinton 2002). Though innovative, this was a relatively brief project. The material effects of the Public Work could have been lost without some evidence in writing of the Public Work concept, its ambitions and practice.

As part of the Public Work evaluation, I also worked as a film producer, collaborating with film makers to produce short films and clips which provided snapshots and learning points from the project, to be used for external promotion to employers and learners, and for internal Skills for Care staff development. I interviewed Higher Apprentices and their employers in different contexts, using questions from an online survey as prompts. I met and talked to users of adult social care services. One group of (HA) managers came together to discuss their learning with an HE provider and their employer and were interviewed on film. The Public Work provided an opportunity to use film to gather and analyse responses from learners, employers and providers - a technique I had developed in evaluation for the UK Museums Association (Museums Association 2012a) and in design of a Collections Learning Hub (Museums Association 2012b).

The Public Work films are not submitted as part of the evidence to support this Doctorate. They are referenced here as they are referenced in the Public Work report and have significance for the practitioner –researcher subjectivity. Their inclusion as evidence for discourse analysis would have over-extended KPS analysis, and the Context Statement.

## 7.2 Constraint and collaboration: instrumentalism and analysis in a game of truth

So far it may appear, so good. But the Public Work report was focussed on demonstrating the Public Work's instrumentalist success, not on any of the conflicts that occurred in its production.

The Public Work had cut across traditional boundaries: between FE and HE institutions; between vocational and academic learning; between different approaches to and cultures of teaching and assessment; between different qualification systems and types; between different public funding mechanisms - and more besides. Each of these were factors affecting the conduct and control of the Public Work and its outcomes but were subsumed or hidden in the report, as secondary or complicating effects. Instrumentalist success – getting the HA Specialist Pathway in place, universities on board, learners registered - dominated the discourse and determined success criteria against which the Public Work would be judged and reported. This is reflected in how evidence from sources was used, how the Public Work report is presented, and what was included in the final redacted report.<sup>22</sup> Recontextualising the Public Work provides an opportunity to review the Public Work report as an instance of discourse in HA development 'across boundaries' and view it differently here.

Skills for Care was expected by employers to act to develop a HA Framework – driven in part by the incentive of public funding of learning leading to specified QCF level 5 Diplomas, were they to be included in a HA, or an absence of public funding if not. One constraint that was *absent* from this Public Work discourse was a coercive imperative from the state to develop an additional Specialist Pathway to HE; this was a workforce development aspiration that came from the sector itself (Skills for Care 2011). This Public Work was achieved primarily through persuasion, driven by moral objects, by an assembly of knowing subjects, able to find alignment in their intentions and actions, operating with a degree of freedom to act, imaginatively and creatively, within a number of known constraints that required navigation, to put the Specialist Pathway in place.

There were three regulatory constraints on the Public Work discourse; QCF regulations (Ofqual 2008); Apprenticeship Framework regulations (BIS 2011a; 2013); university regulations on Exemption, Advanced Standing and RPL. The first two were unavoidable and tightly controlled, the third varied between universities and how each operated under its regulations in practice.

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<sup>22</sup> NOTE: The PW report published included only those sections and recommendations that Skills for Care believed it could act upon.



QCF regulations would not affect the Public Work objectives, provided no changes were required to the specified QCF Level 5 Diplomas included in both the General and Specialist HA pathways. Nine AOs would have had to submit their qualifications for amendment should any changes have been required; the HA Framework was accordingly designed *around* the QCF Diplomas in order to put it in place swiftly. The HA Framework had to meet The Specification of Apprenticeship Standards for England (SASE) requirements (BIS 2011a; 2013), and though these shifted during construction of the HA and after it was launched, the process of gaining National Apprenticeship Service (NAS) approval was eventually, after much negotiation, successfully navigated.

There was no obligation on Skills for Care to collaborate with particular HE providers and no constraint on which HE provider could be involved in the discourse; those that became involved, self-selected; their representatives (practitioner-managers) making a judgment as to their own institution's likely willingness and capacity - but there was a discernable pattern among interested institutions. A review of the evidence from the Robbins enquiry (Parry 2014) is a useful reminder of how much 'Advanced' education was provided in FE institutions from the 1960s onwards and how such provision was managed and funded as Higher Education was prioritised for expansion over Further Education (Parry 2014: 188-189). The 'go to' universities involved in this Public Work were former polytechnics, or their franchisees, or FE institutions with FD awarding powers, hoping their powers would or could be extended to meet Skills for Care requirements. 14 HE providers had expressed interest in the HA specialist pathway by late 2013. All were from the same three institutional types described above.<sup>23</sup> It appears as if the culture of and interest in providing Advanced or Higher 'technical' or 'vocational' education through certain institutions has persisted, whatever the effects of reforms since 1965, or the policy neglect and confusion before or since (Bailey, Unwin 2014). The self-exclusion of those universities that did not involve themselves in the Public Work discourse acted as constraint in itself.

HE providers' criteria for full engagement also followed a discernable pattern, corresponding to their responses to Skills for Care requirements set out in the HA Specialist Pathway Specification. The Specialist Pathway Specification, 'designed to encourage consistency and coherence – but not uniformity - in curriculum design' (Skills for Care 2013: 13), was a constraint created by the Public Work discourse fellowship itself in its members' mutual interest. Adopting the principles of OCN

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<sup>23</sup> NOTE: From an unpublished report for Skills for Care March 2014.

programme development and approval, I drafted a specification for discussion with the HA HE provider group which was tested in conduct of the Public Work and refined subsequently, acting on the Public Work report recommendation to add detailed guidance on pathway module design (2013: 23). The main requirements centered on qualifications, (2013: 15-16) progression, pathway curriculum content, size and level (2013: 17-19) overall design principles ((2013: 19) and information for employers and learners, including costs (2013: 20). These acted as constraints on HE providers but were judged to be in the mutual interest of all directly involved in the discourse and of benefit to potential HAs.

Not all interested HE providers were able to comply, mainly due to the limited capacity of their institutions to act, i.e. lack of staff; unfamiliarity with Care Sector employers; lack of local evidence that Adult Social Care employer/manager demand would cover the costs of investment in the HA. In a few instances university regulation was an obstacle: for example, in limitations on the volume of prior learning achievement that could count towards a university award; or bureaucratic and slow processes of university qualification validation.

There was evidence of more 'cost-effective' programme delivery in FE (Parry 2012: 121) with a significant difference in cost between achievement of the QCF Diploma (through an FE provider) and the additional HA Specialist Pathway modules (through an HE provider), though the overall fee cost of the HA was significantly lower than fully HE delivered programmes of a comparable credit size (Lillis 2013c).

Table 4<sup>24</sup>

<b>New routes into university for people working in adult social care Skills for Care 2013</b>		
<b>Techniques of Discourse (K)</b>	<b>Techniques of Government (P)</b>	<b>Techniques of Self (S)</b>
<p><i>Internal rules of discourse</i> exercised control, shaped and influenced the conduct and outcome of the Public Work through:</p> <p><i>(K-K) Repetition</i> The contrast between open conduct of Public Work project discourses and internal rules for production of the written Public Work report.</p> <p><i>(K-K) Public Work report</i> marshalled evidence to present instrumentalist success; complexities and conflicts were omitted.</p> <p>Only recommendations that could or would be acted upon could be included in the Public Work report.</p> <p><i>(K-K) Individuality and the 'I'</i> Absence of the practitioner-researcher "I" – emphasis on institutional subjectivity and authority of Skills for Care.</p>	<p><i>(P-P) Ordering of forces</i> <i>(P-P) Skills for Care</i> (and sector employers) desire to see HA pathway to university in place for Adult Social Care managers.</p> <p><i>(P-P) Provision of funding</i> to Skills for Care from NAS for development and implementation of the Public Work – instrumental objectives and targets.</p> <p><i>(P-P) A desire to offer access</i> to university learning for the Adult social care workforce, among knowing subjects: individual representatives of universities and Skills for Care.</p> <p><i>(P-P) The demand to prove</i> public money was being spent appropriately on NAS objectives.</p>	<p><i>(S-S) Modes of subjectivation: Agency</i> Acting on behalf of Skills for Care in conducting the Public Work, positioned to assert authority as a practitioner-researcher; acting as expert in credit systems across traditional system boundaries; acting as researcher in conduct of the concurrent evaluation and producer of the Public Work report.</p> <p><i>(S-K) The practitioner-researcher as ethical subject</i> The promotion of the HA Pathway for moral objects – to design and put in place opportunities for entry to university for people unlikely to consider themselves eligible, from a sector which does not have</p>

<sup>24</sup> The three corners of the Foucauldian triangle are examined separately: Techniques of Discourse (K); Techniques of Government (P) Techniques of Self (S). Each of these techniques is further divided into further elementary relational particles constructed through reading [of the Public Work], combining dimensions of Knowledge (K), Subjectivity (S) and Power (P), for example '(P-K) Disciplining practices' or '(S-P) Art of Governmentality' (paraphrasing Heikkinen, et al. 1999: 142). Note that each column reads down but not across.

***New routes into university for people working in adult social care Skills for Care 2013***

Techniques of Discourse (K)	Techniques of Government (P)	Techniques of Self (S)
<p><i>[Multiple] fellowships of discourse (K-K-S):</i>                      A diversity of fellowships combining to exercise agency, particularly HE and FE provider and Skills for Care representatives.                      Conflicting discourse of NAS Apprenticeship Frameworks and interpretation of SASE guidance, with Care employers and Skills for Care HA framework team.</p> <p><i>(K-P) Exclusion:</i>                      Specialist Pathway specification excluded providers unable or unwilling to comply with Skills for Care requirements.                      ‘Self-exclusion’ among HE providers with no interest in engagement in the HA.</p>	<p><i>(P-K) Disciplining practices</i>                      Content and context of the research ordered and limited by Skills for Care.                      Practitioner-researcher subject agency used to persuade Skills for Care to fund the Public Work evaluation and a national conference, to coincide with its instrumental aims.</p> <p><i>(P-K) The state’s policy</i>                      position on HE credit transfer; its planned opening up of competition in HE; its investment in Apprenticeships.</p> <p><i>(P-K-S) Examination</i>                      National scheme for the consistent recognition of vocational learning achievements outside the university having equal value to achievements inside it.</p>	<p>a strong tradition of collaboration with HEIs.</p> <p><i>(S-P) Art of Governmentality</i>                      Inability of the practitioner-researcher to "reactivate the rules" of discourse to create a space within the evaluation research writing to subject the Public Work discourse to critical scrutiny; how anonymity and loss of the Credit Works co-identity restricted the practitioner-researcher, positioned to speak through the Public Work report, of the instrumentalist objectives of Skills for Care and the National Apprenticeship Service.</p>

NOTE: The ‘KPS’ sub-category terms italicised in the table above (*‘Internal rules of discourse’*, etc.) are all drawn from Heikkinen, et al. 1999.

### 7.3 Reflections – subject positioning and anonymity in the Public Work discourse

As with other Public Works, there were several subjectivities operating centripetally in its conduct and production of the Public Work report. In contrast with other selected Public Works, there was little or no direct coercion from the state to enact its objectives; Skills for Care had chosen to apply for NAS funding to develop the HA Framework but was not obliged to develop the Specialist Pathway – this was an experiment that might fail, where the establishment of the ‘General’ HA Pathway could not, funded as Skills for Care was by NAS to develop it and register HA learners. Skills for Care both controlled the discourse but was subject to it: positioned (funded) by NAS to operate instrumentally; subject to codification in NAS controlled SASE regulations (2011; 2013); both deriving power from and subject to its employer constituency; operating under Department of Health policy on Apprenticeships and subjecting itself to its control in production of the Public Work report. Practitioners positioned by their institutions in the Public Work discourse formed a fellowship with broadly common moral or ethical objects. This fellowship was able to exercise agency through its shared knowledge and expertise and the dependence of Skills for Care on the fellowship to succeed in contributing to achievement of its instrumental objectives.

Credit Works was at this point mainly me<sup>25</sup>, the co-identity we had established (Lillis, Stott 2005) difficult to maintain as a subject identity in this Public Work. Though Credit Works was contracted to design and implement the HA Specialist Pathway, I was regarded and positioned as a member of Skills for Care staff. ‘Upscaling’ proved difficult. My anonymity in production of the Public Work report was partly at my instigation. It became clear that I would have limited control over what might be omitted from the published version of the Public Work report and this proved to be the case.

This was a different subject position from that occupied in *conduct* of the Public Work where I was given a high degree of freedom to operate creatively and shared that freedom with colleagues and collaborators in designing the HE Specialist Pathway. In many senses I found more freedom in conduct of this Public Work than any other selected for the Doctorate; on reflection I would say I had gradually developed an understanding of how to locate those power relations that exercised control over discourse and keep focused on these, constantly watching, seeking a creative space in

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<sup>25</sup> NOTE: Credit Works Services co-director Carole Stott became chair of the Association of Colleges in 2012.

which to operate, over what has 'indeed [almost been] a lifetime – in a range of subject positions' (Fairclough 2014: 123).

#### **7.4 Summary**

This Public Work report (Skills for Care 2013) describes progress in development of a project to design new routes into university for people working as managers and specialists in Adult Social Care, a sector that had little tradition of engagement with HE.

The Public Work project designed and put in place a 'Specialist Pathway' within the Skills for Care Higher Apprenticeship Framework in Care Leadership and Management (England), where 80 credits from specified Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) level 5 Diplomas in Adult Social Care counted directly towards specified University Diplomas at Level 5 (Skills for Care 2015a).

The Public Work report (Skills for Care 2013) explains how the Higher Apprenticeship Framework 'Specialist Pathway' was designed, how Skills for Care worked with FE and HE providers and social care employers to create the Pathway and what the project hoped to do next.

This was an innovation in Higher Apprenticeship development, creating a national scheme with multiple HEIs, to accept under a standard national arrangement, credit from the QCF as having equal value in FHEQ qualifications, opening up routes into university for experienced social care managers. The Public Work also opened up another possibility; that learning in Adult Social Care did not have to be reductive and instrumental - an opportunity to push against the 'low-skilled, low status labelling' (Unwin 2009) of vocational learning in the sector and where vocational learning might lead. The project began with 3 HEIs in 2012 and 6 FHEQ qualifications were designed and validated by universities for the HA Specialist Pathway by March 2013. (Skills for Care 2013: 4) All university qualifications included the university validated 'exemption' arrangement. The first cohort of learners progressed through to HE at Middlesex University in 2014. By November 2015, 40% of all HAs in England were in Care Leadership and Management, all having the option to progress directly to university (Skills for Care 2015a).

This Public Work presented an opportunity to attempt to innovate, combining expertise gained through practice and acquired in conducting research, and a chance to apply some of the detailed accumulated technical knowledge I had gained through earlier Public Works, working directly on this

Public Work project with practitioners in vocational learning and higher education, across institutional boundaries, on behalf of an employer network. The Specialist Pathway Specification, 'designed to encourage consistency and coherence – but not uniformity - in curriculum design' (Skills for Care 2013: 13), acted as constraint on HE providers but was judged to be in the mutual interest of all directly involved in the discourse and of benefit to potential HA.

Anonymity in production of the Public Work report was partly at my instigation. It became clear that I would have limited control over what might be omitted from the published version of the Public Work report and this proved to be the case. This was a different subject position from that occupied in *conduct* of the Public Work where I was given a high degree of freedom to operate creatively and shared that freedom with colleagues and collaborators in designing the HE Specialist Pathway.

## **Chapter 8 Cataloguing the possibilities: imagination and creativity inside the constraints of Public Work discourses**

### **8.1 Introduction**

This chapter distils one 'catalogue of possibilities' from the 'KPS' analysis of the selected Public Works; assesses the impact of the Public Works on the constitution of my practitioner-researcher subjectivity; summarises their impact on adult learning reform discourse; and outlines the possible direction of personal and professional development and research.

### **8.2 A catalogue of possibilities: the exercise of government power**

Each Public Work discourse has been scrutinised using the adapted (Heikinenn, et al. 2012) 'KPS' analysis approach; for examples of the operation of Techniques of Discourse (Knowledge), Techniques of Government (Power) and Techniques of Self (the practitioner-researcher subject, institutions and other individual subjectivities), and the results summarised in a Table for each Public Work. The results were used to subject each discourse to one or more of the key questions concerning control of discourse and the operation of subjects – and are further distilled here to provide one 'catalogue of possibilities'.

Government (and those in its orbit), constrained the adult learning reform discourse described, "centering' control over that discourse, invoking ownership, and generating stratified, conventionalised patterns of indexicality to which others in the discourse [were] obliged to orient... to produce meaning' (paraphrasing Blommaert 2005: 74) and in so doing narrowing, circumscribing and stratifying what and who was included or excluded. KPS analysis in Chapters 4-7, shows how the Public Works may have managed to nudge the described reform discourse along a slightly different arc (Lillis, Sparrow 2003), build credit sense and expertise among awarding organisations (Lillis, Stott 2005); test the feasibility of Government objects (Lillis, Stott 2009), or exemplify what might be possible, were Government policy to be more ambitious (Skills for Care 2013). Government (not simply the state but the institutions and individuals in its centering control) controlled the Public Work discourses and those subjects positioned within them.

The value of what might be learned from this perhaps unremarkable discovery, is not so much in what government did, but in how the government exercised that control and what this means for



my practice and the practice of others now, involved in or affected by current and planned adult learning reforms.

KPS analysis shows repeated, observable patterns of discursive control: from the outset, Government narrowly circumscribed and stratified lifelong learning and who should be publicly funded to pursue it, reducing the ACL debate to whether and what should be done with what was left over; with contrasting government positions and approaches to establishing qualifications frameworks in Wales and England: the CQFW, inclusive of all learning, qualifications and institutions, consensual, collaboratively designed, unregulated; the QCF, exclusive of university and 'mainstream' school qualifications, coercive, imposed, regulated and legally enforced. Government adopted a series of exclusions, often saying what and who were to be included in Public Works discourses: AOs dominant in Wales (Lillis, Stott 2005); SBs dominant in England (Lillis, Stott 2009); prescribed basic skills pedagogy in ACL (Lillis, Sparrow 2003); the inclusion of universities and their qualifications in Wales. Government exclusions operated silently – what was not included in the discourse continued to be left unsaid: 'other provision' (Lillis, Sparrow 2003); AO limits on what learning they would share from their learning in Wales (Lillis, Stott 2005); learning providers excluded from testing and trialling the QCF (Lillis, Stott 2009). Government inclusions were spoken loud and were controlled: negatively characterised non-participants in Lifelong Learning, (Lillis, Sparrow 2003); qualifications (with approved characteristics) prioritised for public funding; repetitions of belief in the QCF and its flexibility and responsiveness (Lillis, Stott 2009); invention and control of a new language of qualification design (Lillis, Stott 2009); what could and could not be said in a published report (Skills for Care 2013).

### **8.3 A catalogue of possibilities: constitution of my practitioner-researcher subjectivity**

I have examined my own development inter-relationally as a subject within each Public Work discourse and the subjectivities of institutions and individuals positioned in each discourse, including those that held power and may also have been subject to it, trying to shed some light on how the discourses involved were constrained and controlled, and I have suggested some possible consequences for that in each KPS analysis; and how my own subjectivity (and the subjectivity of others) was constituted in the processes of Public Work production.

As thinking evolved about my practitioner-researcher subjectivity in the course of pursuing the Doctorate, I thought more deeply about how that subjectivity became constituted and how I operate now. The KPS prism is metaphorically static. Shining a light through it might produce one or more catalogues of possibility, depending on the angle of the beam, but the prism stays where it is. The experience of being constituted as a practitioner-researcher subject was however – I would say now – one of constant movement in relation to other subjectivities involved in the conduct of each Public Work. Blommaert (2005: 74) citing Silverstein (1998: 404), says ‘centring institutions’ which may actually *be* ‘central’ (the state, institutions in its direct control) or the family, a peer group, pull discourse towards a normativised centre, ‘[generating] indexicalities to which others have to orient’ – i.e. stratified norms to which subjects need to ‘orient’ or subscribe in order to be listened to.

...this centring almost always involves either perceptions or real processes of homogenisation and uniformisation: orienting towards such a centre involves the (real or perceived) reduction of difference and the creation of recognisably ‘normative’ meaning.

And,

...the social environment of almost any individual would by definition be polycentric, with a wide range of criss-crossing centres to which orientations need to be made, and evidently with multiple ‘belongings’ for individuals (often understood as ‘mixed’ or ‘hybrid’ identities) ... and not every centre has equal range, scope or depth. (Blommaert 2005: 74).

Taking a polycentric view of individual and institutional subjects positioned in each Public Work, goes some way to explaining how, in the most chaotic of them (Lillis, Sparrow 2003), I learned most from the experience. Uncertainties dominated: What was ACL now and what was it going to be? What should be excluded from a normativised ACL and why, and who could say? Government silence on these questions contributed to the chaos and to the ever shifting positions of centring institutions (with unequal and shifting ‘range, scope or depth’) in the discourse. Which ‘centring’ institution or group had enough centripetal pull to generate and stratify norms to which other subjects in the discourse would orient? Adopting a *researcher identity* provided some space to operate and view the different sets of rules, norms and expectations in the polycentric world of the Public Work. Being a *researcher* also meant I could ‘scale jump’ (Chapter 4) to escape some of the normativising effects of particular centring institutions in production of the Public Work report. Shifting subject identity between *practitioner* and *researcher* was a way to orient myself as subject

to the normativising expectations of different centring institutions or groups; this may sound chameleon-like behaviour, though it was more akin to learning to develop chameleon-like sensitivity to their centripetal pull, to help find and use creative space in the discourse.

This analysis was applied in scrutiny of subject positions across the selected Public Works and there is a consistency in the following examples, which show how 'polycentric' awareness of positioning in relation to power and control over discourse is manifested in the constitution of myself as the practitioner-researcher subject: the co-identity of Credit Works directors increased mutual strength and reduced individual vulnerability, lost in production of the final Public Work selected (Skills for care 2013); as knowing subjects positioned by agents of government, Credit Works was morally and practically committed to persuade, but we and [other] subjectivities positioned in Public Work discourse were conscious throughout of its power to coerce (on our behalf); persuading Skills for Care to fund the Public Work evaluation (2013) and a national conference to coincide with its instrumental aims; the desire among some knowing subjects (myself, some employers and individual representatives of universities) to offer access to university learning for the adult social care workforce.

The mobile nature of subject positioning has helped me to develop awareness of what constituted practitioner and researcher identities, how to combine and shift between the two in gaining and keeping agency to pursue moral objects, and how to make alliances to find and use the constraints of the discourse to find an enabling space, to sometimes nudge the discourse trajectory along a slightly different centripetal path.

#### **8.4 Impact on adult learning reform discourse**

Each Public Work at the time of its production, made a contribution to the reform of qualifications systems in England and – given the longevity of the CQFW, a continuing impact on the reform of the qualifications system in Wales.

The Skills for Care Higher Apprenticeship Framework 'Specialist Pathway' was an innovation in Higher Apprenticeship development, creating a national scheme with multiple HEIs, to accept under a standard national arrangement, credit from the QCF as having equal value in FHEQ qualifications, opening up routes into university for experienced social care managers.

Skills for Health, the health sector employer body, has acknowledged that the Higher Apprenticeship model had an impact on commissioning work on the Skills for Health Bridging Programme which I designed and put in place. 'The Bridging Programme develops the study skills that learners need to progress and succeed in health professional education programmes, at universities in England. Combined with relevant vocational qualifications at level 3 (and any recognition of prior learning) and maths/English qualifications, the Bridging Programme offers another possible route into university for motivated and capable healthcare and social care workers.' (Skills for Health 2016). One unforeseen impact has been the adaptation of the OCN concept in Sweden (Svensson 2006). The Public Work report (Lillis, Sparrow 2003) was used to examine and share UK OCN concepts and practice (Svensson O., Lillis, F., Stott, C. 2006) and lead to the adaptation and use of these practices in post-compulsory education in Sweden (Berglund 2010) and interest in subsequent Credit Works research. This work spread from Sweden to Denmark, where research on Learner-referenced achievement (Lillis, Stott 2005; Credit Works 2006) and recent work with OCN London has led to collaboration on the development of programmes for people with learning difficulties and disabilities in Aarhus with OCN Denmark (Lillis 2014).

## **8.5 Possible direction of personal and professional development and research**

My practice has changed irrevocably since pursuing the Doctorate. I have been reminded of the ethical objectives that brought me here professionally, and I have subjected key Public Works to a level of scrutiny I would not have imagined I could undertake, before I began my studies.

I am still involved in work which is breaking (old) new ground and I have been able to test concepts and ideas I have explored in the Doctorate daily, on colleagues and adversaries alike. Testing my thinking at work was a way of reducing the isolation of doctoral study and to articulate complex ideas. This process and the study itself also generated some new thinking on how to apply what I have learned and what I would still like to learn. This is too long a list; I will reduce it to a single item.

The current phase of adult learning reform is fixed upon Apprenticeships (in England), and the latest in a series of visionary documents on the subject (BIS 2015) displays all the characteristics and qualities of preceding adult learning reform policy plans. In England, Apprenticeships have been the focus of attention of adult learning reform since the Wolf report (2011) and the Richard Review

(2012). I would suggest (at least) a detailed discourse analysis of key texts and guidance documents, using perhaps a further adaptation of the (Heikinenn, et al. 2012) approach, tested in this Context Statement to begin the process and an analysis of texts and contexts using the approaches Blommaert (2005: 237) advocated,

discourse analysis should be a social science that utilises linguistic technique to answer social-scientific questions. It is such an interrogation of our data, our objects of inquiry, that may construct a discourse for (not by) anthropologists, sociologists, historians, and political scientists.

Bringing expertise from the disciplines from social science, work based learning and sociolinguistics together in the exercise would bring with it inevitably, issues of interdisciplinarity, but in a worthy cause. To practitioners in Further Education, detailed and specific critical analysis of 'reform' discourse by universities in England would be welcomed, especially where such 'reforms' have a direct impact on those with little or no agency to contest them. Such an exercise would be worth undertaking.

**(29959 words)**

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## **Appendix: Public Works**



National Open  
College Network

# The Rewards of Recognition: the value of NOCN Accreditation, Quality Assurance and Development for Non-Accredited Learning

Finbar Lillis  
Marianne Sparrow

NOCN 2003



## Foreword

During the writing of this report the presence of credit as a key tool in the reform of education and training has become more and more visible and important. Credit emerges as a key theme in policy and strategy from Entry to Employment to Higher Education; from Widening Participation to Workforce Development.

Credit is now recognised as a vital, central component in bringing about a transformation in vocational qualifications. The vision now is that:

“By 2007 modern qualification structures – tailored and quality assured to meet sector needs – will be fully in place within unit-based credit frameworks. Adaptable learning, assessment and funding arrangements will extend access and take-up, improve equality of opportunity and promote lifelong learning.”<sup>1</sup>

Credit has been used outside of formal qualifications to meet the needs of millions of people that simply did not fit into the qualification boxes that the system had devised. The ability of this simple device called credit to match itself to learning needs now become vital in transforming an education system from supply driven demand-led.

But let’s not forget that credit is simply a great device. As this report illustrates, it is the processes and structures around credit, and the people who bring their skills and knowledge to its use and application, that provide the real solution and power to bring about transformation.

**Carole Stott**  
**Chief Executive, NOCN**

NIACE combines a long standing admiration for the role NOCN has played in keeping adult learning opportunities - not least in local authority contexts - and progression routes open with a multi-faceted interest in how learners' journeys, and their achievements en route can be mapped. This study addresses both concerns. For far too long the formal qualifications system has focused on mechanisms to monitor achievement by young learners, and has applied them to adults. The prospect now for a unit-based credit framework fit for purpose for adult learners, as suggested in the Skills Strategy is encouraging - though it will be essential to ensure that policies lead on to adult sensitive practice. The practices reported here will provide a useful benchmark to test the emerging framework against.

**Alan Tuckett**  
**Director, NIACE**

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<sup>1</sup> QCA/LSC/LSDA (not yet published – confidential until release date)

## Introduction

In 2001, the National Open College Network (NOCN) suggested that a study of the value of NOCN accreditation, quality assurance and development for non-accredited learning might help the work of NIACE, the Learning and Skills Development Agency (LSDA), and others in looking at ways of recognising learning achievements that currently go unrecognised (often called 'non-accredited learning', or 'unaccredited learning') beyond the context in which that learning takes place. In the second half of 2002 NIACE (with Local Government Association (LGA) support) commissioned NOCN to undertake this study.

LGA and NIACE interest in supporting this study coincided with their concern to examine the implications in England of the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) funding guidance on the provision of Adult and Community Learning (ACL) programmes. As Local Education Authorities (LEAs) are the largest group of providers of non-accredited learning programmes, their provision formed an ideal focus for the research project.

This research report represents an analysis of the wider benefits of the NOCN approach to recognising learners' achievements through accreditation, and the quality assurance and quality development of learning programmes. We<sup>2</sup> set out to find out what issues were identified through current research into recognising achievement and why and how some of the LEA providers and contractors of ACL used NOCN accreditation. We also examined current Open College Network (OCN) projects that sought to extend the current boundaries of the NOCN accreditation system and what we might learn from them. The research project has been challenging and revealing.

We know that there are lessons here for NOCN and the network of OCNs across the UK. Other accreditation bodies, providers, practitioners, and policy informers and makers may be able to learn something useful too. The conclusions and recommendations are addressed to all those concerned with adult learning and the recognition of achievement.

Thank you to everyone who helped support the research project, including, members of the steering group, and NIACE staff in particular, Local Education Authorities Forum for the Education of Adults (LEAFA) and LEAs, OCNs and NOCN staff, and all those ACL programme managers, practitioners and learners who responded to questionnaires and interviews. Thank you to the LGA for providing financial support. Thanks also to staff at LSC and the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) for their informal but valuable contributions.

## The Writers

**Finbar Lillis** is national development and qualifications officer for NOCN. He has worked in education for over 20 years, in the private, public and voluntary sectors both in the UK and abroad.

<sup>2</sup> (Throughout the report 'we' denotes the authors of the report, Finbar Lillis and Marianne Sparrow).

After six years in training and development in industry, Finbar managed multi-purpose projects with disadvantaged communities in the English midlands and Yorkshire for ten years. From 1996 to 2000 he was a development worker for West and North Yorkshire Open College Network. Since 2000 he has worked for NOCN on new qualifications and other national developments, including proposing, working on, and overseeing NOCN research projects.

**Marianne Sparrow** is the excellence challenge co-ordinator in Derby North East Education Action Zone. Marianne works in three secondary schools to raise educational achievement and to promote Higher Education (HE). She spent two years working at Derby University in the Centre for Access as the university widening participation officer. Marianne worked for eight years in the Careers Service working as an adult learning advisor, ten years in Further Education as a counsellor, and later as a manager, and five years lecturing in HE in Organisational Behaviour.

## About NOCN and the recognition of learning achievement

### NOCN and OCNs

NOCN is one of the largest recognised national qualifications awarding bodies in the UK and the central organisation for 28 OCNs.

OCNs are licensed by NOCN. They are locally managed, not-for-profit partnerships committed to providing a flexible and responsive local accreditation service for a wide range of learning activities. To achieve this OCNs offer:

- Quality assurance for learning programmes.
- External moderation and verification of learning and achievement.
- Award of certificates to learners detailing their achievements.
- Advice and support on curriculum.
- Support from experienced staff through the accreditation process.
- Access to good practice and a database of approved units.
- Access to staff development and networking activities.
- Support for a network of organisations that collaborate on making education more accessible.

OCNs are membership organisations, with over 3,900 members and users of OCN accreditation registered in 2001-2002. Member organisations include universities and higher education institutions, further education and tertiary colleges, sixth form colleges, adult and community education centres, schools, voluntary organisations, trade unions, employers and employer organisations and private training providers.

### The NOCN approach

NOCN seeks to widen participation in learning and increase access to high quality and flexible education in order to promote social inclusion.

NOCN believes that everyone has the right for their achievements to be formally recognised, valued and understood and seeks to achieve this through a national framework of accreditation. All NOCN and OCN accredited provision, including qualifications, falls into this unitised and credit-based framework.

The NOCN framework offers flexibility to meet local and individual needs but, at the same time, is nationally recognised, quality-assured and regulated. It allows organisations to devise their own learning programmes and enables learners to accumulate achievement over time according to needs, circumstances and aspirations. This helps to ensure that the needs of many adults can be met, especially those who have not benefited from traditional education.

## Contents

### Foreword and introduction

#### Chapter 1 Research methodology

- 1.1 Aims of the study
- 1.2 Background
- 1.3 Literature
- 1.4 Language issues
- 1.5 LEAFEA survey
- 1.6 Learners
- 1.7 Providers
- 1.8 The LEAFEA questionnaire
- 1.9 Follow-up interviews
- 1.10 The NOCN system of quality assurance and development

#### Chapter 2 The policy context - Government intervention in approaches to recognition of achievement and accreditation in further education

- 2.1 Basic skills
- 2.2 Social policy and the learning dimension
- 2.3 Summary of main points

#### Chapter 3 Language issues – some observations of meaning and understanding in the language of recognition of achievement and accreditation

- 3.1 Qualifications and the rest
- 3.2 NOCN qualifications versus NOCN accredited learning
- 3.3 NOCN accreditation outside the NQF
- 3.4 NOCN qualifications in the NQF
- 3.5 'Qualifications'
- 3.6 Summary of main points

#### Chapter 4 Some key issues in recognising learning achievement – a survey of current literature

- 4.1 Developing and supporting good practice in recognising achievement
- 4.2 The learning outcomes model and what counts as achievement
- 4.3 Providing quality
- 4.4 Concerns emerging from research into non-accredited learning and analysis
- 4.5 OCN current practice – addressing the challenges
- 4.6 Summary of main points

## **Chapter 5 Adult and Community Learning provision - a survey of LEA and OCN relationships**

- 5.1 The LEA/FEA questionnaire
- 5.2 Follow-up interviews
- 5.3 Quality assurance and development
  - 5.3.1 Programme development and recognition
  - 5.3.2 Moderation
  - 5.3.3 Progression
  - 5.3.4 Professional development
  - 5.3.5 The contribution of learners to quality development of the learning programme
  - 5.3.6 Programme/contract review
  - 5.3.7 The potential for use of NOCN quality assurance and development systems with provision that is currently non-accredited
  - 5.3.8 Recognition of achievement
  - 5.3.9 Follow-up telephone/email interviews
  - 5.3.10 Group interviews with learners
- 5.4 What do learners want?

## **Chapter 6 The NOCN approach to Quality Assurance and Development and Recognising and Recording Progress and Achievement in Non-accredited Learning**

- 6.1 The main features of the NOCN quality assurance system
  - 6.1.1 Programme and unit approval
  - 6.1.2 Assessment
  - 6.1.3 Moderation
  - 6.1.4 Licensing of OCNs
- 6.2 Key elements of the NOCN quality development process and LSC's position on RARPA
  - 6.2.1 The NOCN quality development cycle
  - 6.2.2 The OCN-Provider Agreement
  - 6.2.3 The Learning Programme Plan
  - 6.2.4 Review
  - 6.2.5 Relationship of planning frameworks (including the CIF) to the NOCN quality development process
  - 6.2.6 Implementation
- 6.3 OCN projects supporting non-accredited learning
  - 6.3.1 OCNNELH quality mark system
  - 6.3.2 SEOCN quality mark pilot
  - 6.3.3 LOCN quality mark service
  - 6.3.4 OCNWM quality assurance framework
  - 6.3.5 Recognising group achievement
- 6.4 Summary of main points

## **Chapter 7 Conclusions and recommendations**

## Chapter 1 – Research Methodology

### 1.1 Aims of the Study

The aims of the study were as follows:

- Identification of the key elements of NOCN quality assurance systems and analysis of their potential contribution to the identification and recording of achievement in non-accredited learning, particularly in LEA provision.
- The potential for the development of more coherent progression routes between non-accredited and accredited learning.
- Identification of key factors that contribute to quality improvement in recognising achievement in LEA programmes with particular reference to NOCN's professional development strategy.
- Consideration of the potential for NOCN quality assurance systems to contribute to an understanding of the additional learning gain in non-accredited learning in LEA provision.
- Examination of current Local Learning and Skills Council (LLSC) funded OCN projects that seek to use elements of the NOCN system and approach to quality assure non-accredited learning.

The research project steering group agreed that these aims could be secured by:

- A literature review identifying the issues associated with recognising achievement in non-accredited learning.
- An examination (and clarification where possible) of the use of the language and related terminology used to describe the processes and systems associated with accreditation.
- A survey of LEAs in members of LEAFEA, which would identify membership and use of OCN accreditation, and evidence of knowledge and experience, or otherwise, of NOCN quality assurance and quality development processes and an analysis of responses.
- Examination and analysis of the NOCN quality assurance and development system to ascertain how it might be applied to recognising achievement in non-accredited learning, including an analysis of approaches to identifying and recording non-accredited learning achievement in LLSC funded OCN projects, in particular group achievement.

### 1.2 Background

The research was funded by the LGA, which was keen to examine the implications of LSC funding guidance on the provision of LEAs' ACL programmes.

The development of the LSC Quality Improvement Strategy and funding methodology highlighted the need to obtain suitable approaches to the identification, recording and comparison of achievement in non-accredited learning. This is reinforced by the outcomes

of the Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI) inspection reports (ALI 2002) on ACL, which have focused attention upon both assessment and evidence of achievement in this context.

NOCN Quality Assurance systems for accreditation share a range of critical elements with current approaches to identifying achievement in non-accredited learning. Our research has provided a detailed examination of this correspondence. The research ascertained the potential of the NOCN approach to contribute to both quality improvement and the development of more coherent progression routes across the range of 'other' provision.

### 1.3 Literature

A survey of current literature concentrated on three questions:

- Firstly the policy context – how had Government intervention in approaches to recognising achievement and accreditation influenced and impacted on thinking and practice in recognition of achievement? (Chapter 2).
- Secondly, what had current research suggested as appropriate ways of recognising and quality assuring achievement in non-accredited learning, and what issues are raised in the research?
- Thirdly, looking at current research, evaluation and inspection reports on NOCN provision, to what degree did the NOCN approach to quality assurance and development respond to these issues? Did the NOCN system face similar challenges to those described for non-accredited learning, and what approaches has NOCN taken to address them? (Chapter 4)

### 1.4 Language issues

As can be seen above, the research steering group asked for an examination (and clarification where possible) of the use of the language and related terminology used to describe the processes and systems associated with accreditation. This proved too ambitious, given the breadth of such a task and the resources devoted to the whole research project. It was also judged to be disproportionately too large a task given the focus of the main research questions. However, as the variation in use of language and terminology related to accreditation proved, as expected, to have an impact on our research, it was agreed essential that we would:

- Use language and terminology consistently throughout our research and reporting, and provided a list of working definitions of terms used in the introduction to the report.
- Highlight inconsistencies where they appeared in literature reviewed, and in terminology used by third parties, where such use impacted on our research.

Chapter 3, 'Language Issues – some observations of meaning and understanding in the language of recognition of achievement and accreditation', serves as an illustration of some of the issues encountered in conducting the research.

Please also note the relevant recommendation concerning the language of recognition of achievement and accreditation at the end of this report.



## 1.5 LEAFEA survey

LGA and NIACE interest in supporting this study coincided with their concern to examine the implications in England of the LSC funding guidance on the provision of ACL programmes, the impact upon the quality of such provision and learner choice. As LEAs are the largest group of providers of non-accredited learning programmes, their provision formed an ideal focus for a survey.

Our approach was to survey all 300 LEAFEA members, to try to find out which LEAs were members of their OCN. We wanted to find out which LEAs used NOCN accreditation, and how they related to and used their OCN, and if possible, which LEAs did not, and why.

We also set out to discover, through questionnaires and interviews, what providers thought the NOCN approach to recognition of achievement might offer to the recognition of achievement in non-accredited learning provision. We wanted to find out if the service and support offered by local OCNs had any potential benefits for the quality development of their non-accredited provision.

## 1.6 Learners

Learners on non-accredited programmes were interviewed in groups to gain their views on recognition of achievement. We wanted to find out how important or otherwise recognition of achievement was to them and why. We wanted to find out how much they knew about accreditation and if this had been offered to them as an option. Interviews were conducted with three groups of learners. This method was used in order to reveal consensus views, and to determine whether the views gained through the questionnaire and interviews with heads of service were shared by learners themselves. Learners were interviewed at their place of learning, at three ACL funded evening classes.

Note: Tutors were present at the interviews with learners, but did not take part. They were asked separately if they had any knowledge or experience of NOCN accreditation or their OCN.

## 1.7 Providers

The LEAFEA survey allowed us to talk directly to providers about their views and experiences, and find out how, where and why decisions were made about the accreditation, or otherwise, of ACL provision within their LEA. Factors influencing such decisions were found to be more subtle and diverse than we had anticipated. Given the purported centrality of learners' views to Government ambitions for further education, our survey signalled obstacles to the enactment of that ambition.

## 1.8 The LEAFEA questionnaire

In order to gain background information to inform the research questions, early notification of the research was posted to the LEAFEA membership. Just over 300 questionnaires were circulated to LEAFEA members. The survey generated 64 responses, with 15 of these stating that at present they were not members of an OCN. A summary of results of the LEAFEA survey is given in *Appendix 1*.

## 1.9 Follow-up interviews

The research then focused on in-depth interviews with heads of LEA ACL provision, or those responsible for contracting out the service to other providers.

The criteria for drawing up the sample are listed below:

- A mix of accredited and non-accredited learning
- A mix of contracted out and in-house provision
- A mix of voluntary and community sector and FE providers
- Difference in geographical location
- Curriculum diversity

Face-to-face interviews were conducted with seven LEA heads of service in total, six with OCN member LEAs, and one with an LEA not in membership of its OCN.

The chosen format for the in-depth interviews was semi-structured. The main concern was to have the interview data complement the questionnaire data, and to allow the interviewer to pursue interesting lines of enquiry that the questionnaire had thrown up. Open questions were used to encourage the interviewee to elaborate on points of interest. The interviewer was flexible about the order in which the topics were considered to encourage the interviewee to develop their ideas and speak more widely on the issues raised. The interviews were on average one hour in length.

Due to the research design it was important, with permission, to make an audio recording of the interviews and also to take some additional notes. The participants all volunteered to assist the process by supplying examples of paperwork, which they used in their quality procedures.

The set of questions used in the research can be found in *Appendix 1*.

During the course of the interview people were encouraged to explore how their treatment of non-accredited provision (with regard to quality assurance) differed in any way from their treatment of accredited provision.

Following the face-to-face interviews, a further 12 telephone and/or e-mail interviews were conducted, with a random sample of the remaining respondents. The set of questions used were the same as those used in the face-to-face interviews. Responses were given code letters and the most detailed of the responses are included in *Appendix 1*. These interviews were designed to find out if the views expressed in face-to-face

interviews would be corroborated using a random additional sample. Again a semi-structured format was used.

### **1.10 The NOCN system of quality assurance and development**

The NOCN quality assurance system is described and examined to ascertain how it might be applied to recognising achievement in non-accredited learning.

The NOCN approach to quality assurance and development is examined to ascertain whether and how it might need to adapt and evolve in order to respond properly to the challenges and requirements expressed through current research and project evaluation and the demands expressed through the LEA FEA survey.

LLSCs in England have funded a number of OCN projects to find out whether it is possible to use elements of the NOCN system to quality assure non-accredited learning. The study summarises and provides an analysis of three such projects. Each is at different stages of development or completion; we have used project evaluation reports, and in one case a recently published report, to inform analysis.

## Chapter 2 – The policy context – Government intervention in recognition of achievement and accreditation in further education

This chapter represents a personal view of how Government intervention in the 'how and what' of recognition of achievement in adult learning has influenced provision of learning opportunities to adults.

The volume and frequency of commentary on recognition of achievement in accredited and non-accredited learning steadily increased in the wake of Learning Works (Kennedy 1997), the publication of *The Learning Age* (DfEE 1998), and the introduction of the Learning and Skills Act 2000 (DfEE 2000).

Kennedy's exhortation to disentangle learning from 'a system caught up in what is measurable,' and her assertion that, 'we can forget that learning is also about problem solving, learning to learn... A weapon against poverty... the route to participation and active citizenship,'<sup>3</sup> were responded to in 'The Learning Age' (DfEE 1998) and reflected in the Secretary of State's remit letter to the LSC (DfEE 2000), which restated the need to 'encourage adults back into learning and help the more disadvantaged through relevant provision'. Here were the first indications suggesting a positive Government response to the Kennedy Report (ibid.), perhaps an attempt to connect public social policy to post-compulsory further education, and possibly an implicit recognition that the current offer to adult learners was too narrow and lacked relevance. The policy shift appeared to be towards 'engagement' with the disadvantaged and excluded and the system would have to change to enable this to happen.

Turning these, sometimes elusive, desires into policy and legislation was a little trickier. The Learning and Skills Act (DfEE 2000) divided fundable<sup>4</sup> further education<sup>5</sup> into 'qualifications' (those learning programmes approved by the state and, through a system of regulation and approval, identified by their appearance on approved lists<sup>6</sup>), and 'other provision'<sup>7</sup> (everything else). This division contained for some, the promise of funding for learning provision outside the National Qualifications Framework (NQF), and for others a dangerous marginalisation of some of the more imaginative learning opportunities on offer to all kinds of learners, including those for people characterised as in some way 'disadvantaged'.

If further education policy was mostly to become about funding qualifications in the NQF, then how much or little of the cake would be left for everything else? This, at the time of the Act's publication, was not clear.

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<sup>3</sup> Kennedy, H., *Learning Works: Widening Participation in Further Education*, FEFC, 1997.

<sup>4</sup> 'Fundable' – i.e. learning provision that might attract funding from Learning and Skills Council under the Learning and Skills Act 2001.

<sup>5</sup> Further Education throughout includes what is now referred to as Adult and Community Learning.

<sup>6</sup> Often referred to as the 'section 96 and 97' lists of accredited qualifications, each section referring to sections of the Learning and Skills Act 2001, which designated the age group for which such qualifications were approved by the Secretary of State

<sup>7</sup> 'other provision' is all other provision, which does not appear on the section 96 and 97 lists of accredited qualifications, externally accredited or not, and which is funded under the Learning and Skills Act 2001.

Excitement at the prospect of some elbowroom in the system for funding further education, promised in *The Learning Age* (ibid.), turned to anxiety, despite reassurances from ministers and senior civil servants. If most of the cake was for qualifications then what of the rest?

Organisations that had a track record of reaching the 'disadvantaged' and offering the kind of learning opportunities praised by Kennedy, were worried, not about how much cake would be left, but if they did not offer qualifications, would they be offered any cake at all.

But the LSC adopted a pragmatic 'steady as she goes' position on funding in the immediate period after the Act's introduction (LSC 2001), expecting institutions previously funded by the LSC to maintain their course in the interim period, while a new funding formula was devised. The LSC remained committed, through its consultations (LSC(a) 2002) on funding ACL, and in its Corporate plan (LSC(b) 2002), to the ideals expressed in *The Learning Age*<sup>8</sup>. Turning those ideals into a fundable system for further education has not been a simple task, not yet completed.

In addition, what Government counts as achievement also varies quite widely. Here are three important examples.

## 2.1 Basic skills

The publication of the National Standards and Core Curriculum for Basic Skills and the ESOL Core Curriculum has been generally welcomed by practitioners who worked for many years with little support, advice or curriculum guidance, until recently. Government created substantial financial incentives to providers of adult basic skills provision to encourage expansion of provision in order to improve the literacy and numeracy skills of the adult population.

"There are no details for the UK as a whole. The figures for England are as follows: Up to 7 million adults in England have literacy skills below those expected of an average 11 year old. Even more have a problem with numeracy."<sup>9</sup>

Although other accredited and non-accredited Basic Skills achievements are fundable in England by the LSC, achievement of the National Tests in literacy and numeracy at Levels One or Two is regarded by government as the key indicator of achievement of basic skills.

"The Tests are directly related to the new national standards for adult literacy and numeracy. This means that learners, tutors and employers will have a clear understanding of what has been achieved and will value the resulting qualifications."<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> ibid.

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.dfes.gov.uk/readwriteplus/FAQs#q6>

<sup>10</sup> ibid.

This action by Government from September 2002 went further than ever before in determining the role, nature, content and type of assessment that counts as achievement in adult learning. The Tests do not assess achievement of speaking and listening skills for example, and the question of how this fact impacts on the current value of the qualifications has yet to be answered. The enactment of this policy in recognising adult basic skills (and perhaps other) achievements may yet have far reaching implications for recognition of other types of adult achievements in the future.

What the Government counts as achievement was made very plain in its characterisation of adult basic skills and the methods to be used to recognise basic skills achievement. Once policy set ambitious targets for the achievement of adult basic skills qualifications (DfEE 2000), the perception that other, more subtle approaches to developing literacy and numeracy skills did not count (for funding purposes and therefore at all) began to grow among further education and adult learning finance managers. No amount of reassurance that LSC funding guidance would clarify the distinction between targets and what was fundable would reassure the belt and braces approach adopted by those managing the money. Why should they be expected to take the risk of misinterpretation of the rules and responsibility for consequential financial loss?

Meanwhile basic skills practitioners continued to complain that their experience of 'what worked' was at serious odds with the Government's definition of what counted.

## **2.2 Social policy and the learning dimension**

What of the learning dimension to other areas of public social policy? Since May 2002 the Regional Co-ordination Unit (RCU) and Government Offices for the Regions (GOs) have been part of the newly formed department, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM). The ODPM has taken on new responsibilities for housing, planning, regeneration and regional and local services. Among their responsibilities are over forty Area Based Initiatives (ABIs)<sup>11</sup>

ABIs such as Sure Start, The Neighbourhood Renewal Fund, Health and Education Action Zones all make clear in their strategy statements that learning has to be at the heart of local strategies for success. However, the single-mindedness of the Government's basic skills strategy appears absent from these initiatives. Rather, Government invests in ABIs, creates an overall framework for development and delivery, but seeks local (i.e. not national) solutions to old problems and exhorts those responsible for making step changes to come up with new solutions:

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<sup>11</sup> Area Based Initiatives (ABIs) are publicly funded initiatives targeted on areas of social or economic disadvantage, which aim to improve the quality of life of residents and/or their future life chances and those of their children. They have one or more of the following features:

- Aimed at particular geographical areas, or intended to have a greater impact in some areas or regions than others;
- Managed through regional, sub-regional or local partnerships;
- Intended to support a number of objectives locally which are the responsibility of more than one Department;
- Put forward as pilots or pathfinders for programmes that will ultimately be rolled out nationally.

At the time of writing, there were over forty ABIs listed at <http://www.rcu.gov.uk/abi>.

"The National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal requires a change in the way we work in and engage with communities in deprived areas. Residents, policy makers, practitioners, professionals and organisations all have a role in neighbourhood renewal, but many may not realise what is being asked of them. New skills and knowledge for neighbourhood renewal are needed if such widespread involvement is to succeed."<sup>12</sup>

However, the requirement set out in 'Transforming Youth Work' (DFES 2003) that 60 per cent of young people worked with in the 13-19 age-range must 'Undergo personal and social development which results in an accredited outcome,' has potentially far-reaching implications. Such a demand will change the role of the Youth Worker, and some might argue, the function and purpose of Youth Work itself.

In September 2002 LSC began a fundamental review of funding arrangements for ACL (LSC(c), 2002) the review (paragraphs 3 and 5) recognises that the outcomes of the consultation would have 'wider relevance in relation to post 16 learning provision'. Feedback from consultation events organised by NIACE across the country indicated a positive response in general to the LSC's proposals. Participants welcomed a funding methodology that appeared to allow room to innovate new forms of provision and record and recognise achievements internally; however, there was still confusion as to where ACL began and ended. The final outcome of the consultation was not concluded at the time of writing.

The LSC was (at the time of writing) consulting extensively on its Widening Participation Strategy (LSC 2003). Success criteria were expressed implicitly (para. 110) revisiting the target groups identified in the Kennedy Report (*ibid.*), and the FEFC Report (FEFC 2000), which identified a number of adult groups as 'having low levels of participation'. Reaching excluded or disadvantaged learners has been a priority of widening participation strategies since the Kennedy Report. The reduction in 'opportunity costs', better health, lower crime rates, better engagement in civil society, Kennedy's 'route to active citizenship' is one of the implicit objectives of LSC's Widening Participation Strategy. Increasing involvement in economic activity, Kennedy's view of learning as a 'weapon against poverty' underpins the rationale for the Government's Basic Skills Strategy.

Connection and synergy between these and other strands of social and education policy will require the transformation of the education establishment's role in determining and providing learning opportunities. Funding methodologies, for accredited and non-accredited learning, are still largely suited to the classroom, with a tutor or teacher in control of the class and curriculum. The challenge from other strands of public social policy to the education establishment goes well beyond questions of accreditation and non-accreditation.

In summary, there is a marked inconsistency in Government policy relating to recognition of learning achievement. It is hard to know how, for example, the significant policy determination of appropriate basic skills assessment sits alongside the 'what works' philosophy set out in *The Learning Curve* (ODPM, 2002), given that the same

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<sup>12</sup> ODPM, *The Learning Curve Neighbourhood Renewal Unit*, 2002.

communities, and even the same people, are likely to be on the receiving end of ABIs, basic skills investment and newly transformed local youth services.

The absence of explicit success criteria in the LSC's draft Widening Participation Strategy, suggests Government is not absolutely clear whether its objective is reaching excluded learners, or improving the economy, or both.

The examples are included here to help frame the important current backdrop to the focus of this study. The ebb and flow of Government influence, (on funding, and now curriculum) in further education, should not be underestimated, nor the consequent influence on our thinking. But a number of new contributors are being drawn into policy discussions on learning, recognition of achievement and accreditation and they come from different Government departments, different organisations and different learning cultures. The discussion about the relative merits of recognition of learning achievement and accreditation will need to take account of and listen to this much broader range of interests.

### **2.3 Summary of Main points**

Government intervention in recognising the learning achievements of adults continues to exert a substantial influence on practice, and is driven by different and perhaps sometimes competing factors:

- The desire to measure the achievements of individuals and the primacy of the NQF for this purpose.
- The demand to measure the achievements of, among others, education providers, youth workers and regeneration managers.
- The desire to offer an inclusive curriculum to the 'disadvantaged and excluded' for the sake of social cohesion (and/or improved economic performance).
- The need to prove public money is being spent appropriately.
- The primacy of prescribed literacy and numeracy skills and qualifications in the Government's adult learning strategy.
- The absence of clear success criteria for evaluating learning and learning achievements considered crucial to the success of public social policy.
- Policy as to how further education should be funded.



## **Chapter 3 – Language issues – some observations of meaning and understanding in the language of recognition of achievement and accreditation**

We have, for the purposes of our research provided working definitions of the language and terminology used in this report (see Glossary of Terms). The purpose of this research is not an exhaustive examination of the use of language in the qualifications and accreditation business. We found however, that it was impossible throughout the research, to ignore the impact of the varying interpretations given to some terminology. The illustrations below are drawn from NOCN's experience. A wide range of terminology and language is associated with recognition of achievement and accreditation. We have focussed our attention below on the current use of the terms 'qualification', 'accreditation', 'accredited learning' and 'non-accredited learning'. The illustrations we have used do not address all the uses of these terms by all the stakeholders. They are presented to serve two purposes: firstly, to show how the practical distinctions between qualifications, other accredited learning and non-accredited learning are subtler than the terms appear to allow; secondly, to illustrate how the lack of an easy distinction between these terms can lead to an elision of their meanings.

There is considerable scope in this area for further work. There is a need for the redefinition (or even re-appropriation) of a common language to describe recognition of achievement. This need is addressed in our conclusions and recommendations.

### **3.1 Qualifications and the rest**

The working definitions we have provided are straightforward enough. But as we discuss in chapter 4, the Learning and Skills Act (2000) neither defines a 'qualification' nor makes a distinction between different types of 'other provision'. LSC Funding Guidance 2003 (LSC 2003) even refers to 'qualifications outside the National Qualifications Framework'.

### **3.2 NOCN qualifications versus NOCN accredited learning**

One form of NOCN accreditation is not necessarily qualitatively inferior to the other, even though one may 'automatically' attract funding as an accredited qualification and the other, as 'other provision', may not. NOCN accredited provision offered outside the NQF is, in its implementation, consistent with quality assurance and development standards and processes specified for NOCN qualifications in the NQF.

### **3.3 NOCN accreditation outside the NQF**

What are some of the differences between accredited provision within and outside of the NQF? There is local control of curriculum design when programmes are developed and

approved by OCNs at a local level. Providers can work with their OCN to develop learning programmes to meet specific local needs, where necessary and appropriate, involving learners in the process. Awarding of OCN credits to learners, for achievement through locally-approved OCN programmes, does not require external assessment, although it does require external moderation to verify achievement. All learning achievement can be assessed internally and then externally moderated. The process and cost of developing and gaining approval from an OCN for a learning programme plan is small, compared with the process and cost to NOCN of developing a national qualification. A timescale for local programme development is agreed between OCN and provider. NOCN does not have control over QCA's process or timescale for accrediting national qualifications. The advantages of local programme development also apply to NOCN national products outside the NQF, developed with a variety of national organisations<sup>13</sup>, including the TUC, NACAB, and The Scouts Association.

### 3.4 NOCN qualifications in the NQF

National qualifications have their place in meeting demand, alongside (and embedded within) local OCN programmes. Not all qualifications are the same: it is possible to design responsive, high quality external assessments for national qualifications, which learners complete over time, are personally relevant, and are a celebration (and culmination) of a personal programme of learning. Not all external assessment uses, or needs to be offered in the form of, examinations or tests. For the learner, the experience of achieving NOCN units, which count towards a NOCN national qualification, should be the same as their experience of achieving a non-NQF OCN unit.

What may have passed as qualifications ten or twenty years ago may bear little resemblance to some of the new qualifications in the NQF today.

NOCN has worked hard to 'squeeze the pips' out of the NQF, working creatively with QCA accreditation criteria, to provide the maximum flexibility and learner-centredness possible within those constraints. NOCN has contributed to the review of procedures, criteria and regulations conducted by the regulatory authorities in 2002 - 2003. Whatever the outcome of the review, one thing is plain: challenges to the regulators on the basis of demand, and on the basis of successful practice, has made a positive difference to the way in which the regulators have interpreted the regulations over the last five years. 'Qualifications' may be encapsulated by legislation, but they are not defined by it.

### 3.5 'Qualifications'

Legislation draws a distinct division between qualifications and everything else. There is no definition of a qualification in the Learning and Skills Act (2000). We have adopted the following definition of a qualification for the purposes of this report:

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<sup>13</sup> See NOCN website [www.nocn.org.uk](http://www.nocn.org.uk) for further information

“A specification accredited into the National Qualifications Framework, which can demonstrate that it meets the appropriate criteria and codes of practice set by the regulatory authorities. It can only be offered by an Awarding Body accredited by the regulatory authorities, or by a Higher Education Institution.”

The Remit letter from the Secretary of State to LSC (2000)<sup>14</sup> set out the operational priorities for the LSC's first year and stated, 'not all learning should lead to awards, learners will want to pursue high quality and rigorous study for its own sake.'

“Whilst qualifications are very important and accreditation will continue to be appropriate for the majority of courses, we also want to see the LSC provide opportunities for learners to gain recognition for their achievements other than through qualifications.” (Learning and Skills Council Prospectus para 5.27, DfEE 2000)

Given everything we have said so far, it is difficult to know what the Secretary of State meant here, by 'awards', 'qualifications' and 'accreditation'. Are 'awards' only those which lie within the NQF? Is 'recognition for ... achievements other than through qualifications' an allusion to OCN accreditation, or a reference to the need for an entirely new system for recognition of achievement, now referred to as 'unaccredited' or 'uncertificated' learning?

The answer is that it depended where you stood at the time of its publication. If you were waiting for an inclusive reference to approaches to accreditation other than qualifications, then this was it. If you felt dissatisfied with the impact of the 1992 Act<sup>15</sup> then here was evidence, if needed, of the Government's commitment to recognising non-accredited learning.

Given the very broad definition of 'Other Provision' in the Learning and Skills Act 2001, the lack of consistency in interpretation was critical to the direction of the debate that followed.

Turner and Watters offered the following definitions of accredited and non-accredited learning:

**"Accreditation** is the awarding of credit usually through some form of examination or a process of external evaluation of the quality of the learning that has taken place. It is a means of allocating a formal and portable currency value within an accreditation and qualifications framework, for the learning and achievement. The learner may use this to gain entry to further learning or to improve her/his economic or social status through improved employment prospects or access to enhanced earnings.

“The term '**non-accredited learning**' refers to learning not designed to give immediate access to accreditation. Learners cannot gain credit in the sense of currency value, although they and others may consider the learning to be 'creditable' in the sense of having value. One purpose of seeking appropriate ways of identifying, recording and

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<sup>14</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> *ibid.*

evaluating learning gain on non-accredited programmes would be to give learners such recognition and confirmation of value."<sup>16</sup>

Not all accredited learning leads to credit, or is assessed through examination or external evaluation. As discussed above, not all accredited learning leads to the (partial or complete) achievement of qualifications in the NQF.

However, a system of external verification of achievement is common to all accredited learning, the 'externality' provided by an agency 'external' to the accredited learning provider, using (usually) its own, publicly declared system of quality assurance. Such systems of quality assurance may be approved by the state or its agents – awarding bodies are 'accredited' by the Regulatory Authorities (for example in England, QCA) to offer qualifications in the NQF, and their quality assurance systems applied to qualifications are also regulated. Quality assurance systems applied to accrediting achievements outside the NQF are, to date, beyond the scope of the Regulatory Authorities' regulations.

Non-accredited learning does not lead to such external verification. These distinctions are important, as certain types of accredited learning are in the control of the State, through regulation and approval of qualifications and units of qualifications, and other forms of accreditation, as discussed above, are not. This is important when we come to ascertaining the 'constraints' placed upon accreditation: some constraints are, in the case of NQF qualifications, externally imposed by the State; and, in others, may be features of the accreditation body's own systems. When challenging those systems to respond to different demands and learner aspirations, it is critical to understand exactly where the responsibility for different 'constraining factors' in accredited learning are located.

Crucially, Turner and Watters do point to the concern of many practitioners engaged in liberal adult education: accreditation seems to confer value, and non-accredited learning needs a system which gives 'learners such recognition and confirmation of value'. One important question is whether we need another different system for recognising achievement bringing along its own inevitable constraints, or whether we can use existing accreditation systems and see them refined and improved to build a bridge between learning that does not lead to accreditation and learning that does. It is important to remember that this same demand was the main motivating force for the creation of the OCN movement in the first place. The NOCN approach to recognition of achievement has evolved and adapted over the last 20 years and it must continue to do so to stay inclusive.

### 3.6 Summary of Main Points

#### Language and Meaning

- There is a wide range of terminology and language associated with recognition of achievement and accreditation.

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<sup>16</sup> Watters, K., Turner, C., *Proof positive: learners' views on approaches to identifying achievement in non-accredited learning*, NIACE 2001.

- Inconsistency in the use of language in the field has inhibited our research and, more importantly, inhibits proper public debate and discussion of issues and ideas relating to recognition of achievement.
- A common language for recognition of achievement and accreditation would enable effective discussion and development of theory and practice to take place.

### **Impact on Usage**

- Different interpretations of the terms 'qualifications', 'awards', 'accredited and non-accredited learning' may have led to less subtle distinctions being made between each category than actually exists in practice.
- Though regulations associated with NQF qualifications are constraining, different approaches to qualification design can be accommodated within the NQF.

## Chapter 4 – Key issues in recognising learning achievement – a survey of current literature

What had current research suggested as appropriate ways of recognising and quality assuring achievement in non-accredited learning, and what issues are raised in the research?

### 4.1 Developing and supporting good practice in recognising achievement

In 1997 FEDA published 'A sense of achievement: outcomes of adult learning' (Foster, P., Howard, U., Reisenberger, A. 1997) intended as a contribution to the development of good practice in recognising learners' goals and achievements for learning 'not designed to lead to qualifications'.

'Outcomes of Adult Learning: taking the debate forward' was published by FEDA and NIACE in 2000. This comprised a series of papers written in response to the challenge presented by the creation of the LSC: the challenge of devising robust standards, sensitive to the multifarious needs of students for which the LSC would be responsible and its ability to encourage adults and disenchanted young people to become lifelong learners.

In 2001 the LSDA (formerly FEDA) published 'Recognising and validating outcomes of non-accredited learning' (Greenwood et al LSDA 2001). This described the developmental work of practitioners engaged in analysing the issues and identifying the strengths of practice aimed at recognising student progress in non-accredited programmes. Material included case studies, a NIACE examination of learners' perspectives, and a framework for good practice.

'Learning in progress: recognising achievement in adult learning' (LSDA and NIACE 2002) included a practical discussion of how to respond to such conflicting priorities as meeting the diverse needs of learners on the one hand and responding to national priorities on the other. The value and uses of assessment in adult learning are explained and the discussions are illustrated with exercises and case studies.

Attempts were made to merge the demands of the OFSTED and FEFC inspection frameworks. (HOLEX 1999) produced a draft for a self-review framework for LEA's based on a synthesis of both frameworks. Under 'student achievement' the document included:

- *"Specification of learning goals*
- *Standard of work*
- *Personal development*
- *Achievement of intended learning outcomes*
- *Student progression*<sup>17</sup>

Hayes et al concluded that a consideration of the above issues should result in routine methods for recording:

<sup>17</sup> Holey, *A self-review framework*, January 1999.

- *"Students' individual needs/interests (student' objectives)*
- *Tutors' initial objectives*
- *Some standardisation of how intended outcomes are written*
- *Students' assessment of the extent to which they have achieved the objectives*
- *Tutors' moderation of whether students have achieved the desired learning outcomes over a standard period*
- *Students' unanticipated learning outcomes*
- *Students' progression within the course and beyond it*
- *The extent to which each group of students have achieved the learning outcomes*
- *A synthesis of achievements group by group*
  - *Achievement of intended learning outcomes*
  - *Achievement of unanticipated learning outcomes*
  - *Progression within the course/beyond the course*
  - *The extent to which benchmarks have been reached/exceeded*
- *A synthesis of achievement in each curriculum area*
- *Benchmarks for what might be achieved in the following year*
- *Standard performance indicators for achievement*<sup>18</sup>

Such methods could be applied to all learning, accredited or not.

The development of such advice and guidance to LEAs, and other providers of adult learning, prompted by the earlier referenced reports and the creation and remit of the LSC, offered practical guidance to practitioners, much of which has equal application to those engaged in delivering accredited learning.

Whether practitioners are able to access resources to improve their practice is another matter. Add to this the problem of inventing a new system for recognising achievement, *and* quality assuring it, and the struggle is very much uphill (LSC 2003)<sup>19</sup>. Building the capacity and capability of providers is essential for the successful implementation of curriculum, practitioner and provider guidance.

In a recent report on the evaluation of the Basic Skills and ESOL in Local Communities project, (Grief, NIACE 2002) it was recognised that providers need further guidance on the recognition and recording of non-accredited achievement and on the evidence required for audit. The report found that practice in recording learner progress was patchy and that many projects used the systems and paperwork devised for mainstream programmes. Some projects made no attempt to screen or assess learners. Other projects explored ways in which learners' starting points could be established in sensitive and unobtrusive ways. In many cases starting points for learners were identified by the tutor through an initial interview or by observation during course activities. The report also found that teaching in community settings could be more challenging than teaching on mainstream courses. Cases of poor and inappropriate teaching that were encountered were usually in institutions that had experienced difficulty in recruiting staff and had employed inexperienced and often untrained teachers to run courses.

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<sup>18</sup> Hayes, A., Lavender, P. Reisenberger, A. and Vorhaus, J. *Outcomes of adult learning: taking the debate forward*, FEDA/NIACE, 2000.

<sup>19</sup> LSC Position Paper on Recognising and Recording Progress and Achievement in Non-accredited Learning. LSC 2003

Turner and Watters (2001) detailed the approaches to practice concerning the identification, recording, and validation of achievement in non-accredited learning. They found that practice varies significantly. Learners interviewed for the purposes of the research produced a range of observations upon different elements of the approaches they experienced. A summary of the positive aspects learners identified is given below.

- Opportunities to influence course content, planned learning outcomes and delivery methods – ‘the learner’s domain’.
- Some focus on what learners can or should be able to learn by the end of the course to provide a flexible framework for study.
- Personal goals identified by some learners and valued as part of the programmes.
- Enhanced awareness of learning gain through feedback and ongoing informal assessment.
- Enhanced individual insight into learning progress by the end of the course.
- Less of the pressure and competition associated with exams.
- Emphasis on learner self-assessment of progress and achievement linked to enhanced confidence and skills for learning.

The negative aspects learners identified focus primarily on the completion of paperwork and the processes involving assessment. These included:

- Time spent on paperwork
- Repeat completion of paperwork
- Feeling they were being ‘assessed’ or judged
- Concern about excessive take-up of the tutors’ time by individuals

The learners in the sample revealed a mix of purpose, including both long and short-term goals. Most learners identified some form of skill acquisition as their overall motivation; very few had consciously chosen non-accredited programmes as a precursor to accredited learning. Learning outcomes were generally welcomed in terms of their contribution to learning. Most learners recognised the value of considering outcomes at the start of their programme. They were seen as creating a useful, flexible framework, which helped people to understand what they had signed up to. Further responsiveness to learners’ interests and needs was linked to delivery, not renegotiation of the outcomes.

The report also found that most learners were not aware that formative assessment had taken place. Turner and Watters noted that this is an area that needs to develop good practice further, in order to support more self-reflective and critical learners. Few learners referred to initial assessment, the notable exception being in the area of basic skills where students were more accustomed to working with individual learning plans.

The report highlighted a series of issues that need to be considered when identifying, recording and evaluating learning gain in non-accredited provision.

Among the systemic and financial issues identified were those listed below:

- *"The previous division of programmes into Schedule 2 and non-Schedule 2 resulted in differential emphasis on quality assurance and therefore an uneven development of quality assurance systems and improvement mechanisms.*



- *Self-assessment using evidence of progress and achievement is new to many current and aspiring providers of non-accredited programmes.*
- *No requirement that all tutors and facilitators of learning are trained, e.g. in assessment of learning.*
- *Providers have few fulltime administrators, organisers or managers to record and monitor the outcomes of more systematic processes.*
- *Costs of developing robust alternatives to accreditation are likely to be considerable, e.g. validation of learner self-assessment and moderation of tutor validation.*
- *Costs of achieving compliance with quality assurance requirements may deter or exclude new providers such as community and voluntary organisations in touch with hard to reach new potential learners.<sup>20</sup>*

As noted by Turner (NIACE 2001) there are obvious issues for providers surrounding capacity, particularly when all publicly-funded providers, and their provision, are subject to the same scrutiny (irrespective of accreditation), especially in terms of quality assurance.

Pilot inspections of ACL by ALI endorse recommendations made by LSDA, NIACE and the LSC – that learners' needs were not being met. The pilot inspections found that:

- *"There was insufficient recording and checking of learners progress.*
- *Initial assessment was not adequate, particularly in programmes which were accessible to all learners.*
- *There was too much emphasis on end of programme assessment and the outcomes of learning when compared with formative assessment of progress during the programme.*
- *Insufficient attention was given to individual learners' needs.*
- *Insufficient information was available on progress and achievement.*
- *There was insufficient analysis of learners' evaluations.<sup>21</sup>*

Here is evidence of the difficulties faced by ACL providers when meeting inspection requirements. These difficulties reflect the challenges faced by providers and described in detail by Turner and Watters (ibid.). Recent ALI inspection reports of ACL programmes indicate some positive improvements, but 12 of the 15 ACL providers inspected in the six month period to June 5 2003 were graded 4 (unsatisfactory) for quality assurance. How ACL providers should address such shortcomings is a key question. LSC's Position Paper (ibid.), which is informed by the work of NIACE and LSDA, describes (at the time of writing) proposed minimum standards for recording and recognising achievement in ACL non-accredited provision funded by LSC. Chapter 6 details how NOCN and OCNs have responded and might support and validate providers' efforts to meet LSC requirements.

## **4.2 The Learning Outcomes Model and what counts as achievement**

For many organisations, working with a learning outcomes model has been the mechanism for recording achievement in non-accredited courses.

<sup>20</sup> Watters, K., Turner, C., *Proof positive: learners' views on approaches to identifying achievement in non-accredited learning*, NIACE 2001.

<sup>21</sup> ALI, *Adult and Community Learning Pilot a Summary Report*, ALI, March 2002.

There are several challenges for providers identified in the FEDA report (FEDA 1997)<sup>22</sup> concerning using a learning outcomes approach. These concerns were grouped using the following question headings:

- The intentional framework: what is the purpose of the scheme; will evidence of intended and unanticipated outcomes be collected; will the process be led by managers, tutors or students?
- The mechanics: how will learning outcomes be explained; what is acceptable evidence?
- The 'learning process' outcomes: will the scheme acknowledge learning gains at different stages?
- The harvest outcomes: (at the end of the learning period) how will the outcomes be gathered; how will the evidence be assessed and by whom?
- The ecological issues: are the benefits worth the effort; does it benefit enough people?
- The resource issue: is the scheme manageable and administratively possible?
- Evaluation: what are the benefits to the organisation; what is the value added for individuals, organisations and nationally?

These are important and relevant matters for consideration. *How* providers will construct systems and develop skills to address them is an issue that emerged strongly in the LEAFEA survey (chapter 5). In addition, Hayes et al (FEDA/NIACE 1999) pose the question of distinguishing between a 'learning outcome' identified in the course syllabus and 'outcomes of learning' which might be unanticipated. Indeed they question whether all learning should be measured and all learning be accreditable. Hayes states, "I am concerned that these learning outcomes are often difficult to measure and have therefore not been a significant feature of formal validation systems."

Discourses about what constitutes a learning outcome, fundable through the public purse, have persisted and continue to remain the focus of current debate. There is a difference between learning achievements that cannot be *measured*, because they are 'difficult to measure' quantifiably and those learning achievements that cannot be measured *quantifiably*, but might still be recognised. As there appears to be no obvious consensus on the meaning and use of 'measure' in these contexts it is hardly surprising that there remains a lack of clarity in this argument. That accreditation systems need to evolve and respond to the subtleties identified by Hayes is not in dispute. *Measure* used as a verb could mean, to identify an exact amount or, to identify an indication of change. The former definition connotes quantification, the latter not necessarily so.

Vorhaus (FEDA 1999) contributed to the debate by focusing on the use of learning outcomes in non-accredited provision. His concerns were primarily about the focus of educational policy on that which appeared measurable and particularly the emphasis on the extrinsic rather than the intrinsic benefits of learning. He argued that not all outcomes of learning are learning outcomes. Additional outcomes he suggests, may include economic, social, and personal benefits. As such, he feels that it is important to acknowledge that outcomes such as a growing confidence to learn are not overlooked in evaluation of the impact of adult education. He argues that learning can be a long-term

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<sup>22</sup> A Sense of Achievement. FEDA 1997

developmental process, which is subject to the generation of unpredictable outcomes, which may have a causal relation to the teaching. Therefore he states “not all outcomes match objectives”.

Such 'additional outcomes' may be the primary focus for learning activity in the first place and learning seen (by learners) as part of the process of achieving a particular individual or collective goal. The primary goal of public social policy may well be to achieve economic and social regeneration: learning is central to the achievement of that goal. Accredited or not, recognition of individual learning achievement will not record these gains. In valuing achievement there is a need to recognise collective learning gains and reward them and to develop an approach that captures the wider benefits of learning over time. This requirement has been recognised by the Wider Benefits of Learning Research Centre, (Schuller et al 2002)<sup>23</sup>

Vorhaus argues that the primary source of evidence of learning outcomes ought to emerge from formative assessment, as it is appropriate and realistic to both tutors and students. He states that it is best suited to recording student learning. This was also recognised by the FEFC (1997):

“FEFC inspection research work on value added included the question of what that means when there are no qualifications appropriate. With the ideal curriculum being an individual one, individual outcomes need to be set against the original individual assessment but how then can targets be set that are about the whole cohort when the assessment, the curriculum and the achievements are entirely individual?”<sup>24</sup>

The difficulties of administering a system of assessment when a cohort of learners are each pursuing different goals is not exclusive to non-accredited learning. Again 'qualifications' are not defined here, but one gets the impression that a qualification in this setting is one with a single proscribed outcome for all. Qualifications do not need to drive the learning programme. Qualifications can be offered at a variety of levels with a variety of options for each learner. The management of assessment in these circumstances is a skilled process, but it is possible. The notion that there should be a single narrow target for 'the whole cohort' is already an outdated one, but systems for recognising achievement (and funding) have a considerable way to go before they are capable of capturing and rewarding (with accreditation and funding) all the achievements of individuals: formative, summative, collective and communal.

The high profile of statistical performance data posed a major challenge to those seeking a framework for measuring 'value added'. A review of literature and empirical evidence concerning the soft outcomes of learning by Dewson et al 2000 defined them as those outcomes that are:

- “Intangible, not concrete
- Subjective
- A matter of degree rather than absolute
- Personal, depending on individual client needs

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<sup>23</sup> Learning Continuity and Change in Adult Life. Report no.3 June 2000 Tom Schuller, Angela Brassett-Grundy, Andy Green, Cathie Hammond and John Preston.

<sup>24</sup> FEFC, *How to make learning work*, FEFC, 1997.

- Intermediate (usually measuring progress towards hard outcomes).<sup>25</sup>

Dewson identified interplay between indicators and outcomes, in that indicators were the means by which it was possible to measure whether outcomes had been achieved. The term 'soft indicator' was used when referring to achievements, which may 'indicate' acquisition or progress towards an outcome. It was clear that not all indicators, or measures of progress, were necessarily suitable for all client groups: some were target group specific. Soft outcomes were classified into two types: core outcomes and target group specific outcomes. Core outcomes were those most likely to be relevant to most learners and were classified as relating to:

- Attitudinal skills, for example increased levels of motivation, confidence and self esteem.
- Personal skills.
- Practical skills.

Dewson found that most projects measured soft outcomes and distance travelled using paper-based techniques, which examined attitudes and feelings with comparisons over time. Most projects used ongoing reviews between tutors and learners to 'record' soft outcomes. These often drew on evidence produced by the learner, such as portfolio evidence or examples of progress, such as working productively in a team. Reviews such as this were often recorded on Individual Learning Plans. A cautionary note from Dewson on the use of such self-administered questionnaires: "They are subject to learners over or underestimating their achievements."<sup>26</sup>

### 4.3 Proving quality

Lavender 2000 gives reasons for identifying learning outcomes, including "The need to show that programmes without accreditation can be just as rigorously evaluated in terms of students' achievements as those which are accredited." Also "The need to produce robust evidence of student achievement over time as a means of underpinning quality assurance systems and to show evidence to funders and inspectors."<sup>27</sup>

The value of recognition of achievement for learners can be subverted to the demand for proof from the state that all learning is properly quality assured, whether or not (or how) the learner is interested in having their achievements recognised. A learning outcomes strategy for recognising achievement in non-accredited learning may then be subjected to the same pressures as those supposed for accredited learning, where evidencing the quality of learning provision may become the primary objective.

<sup>25</sup> Dewson, S., Eccles, J., Tackey, N. D., Jackson, A. *A Guide to Measuring Soft Outcomes and Distance Travelled*, Research Report 219, DfEE, 2000

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Hayes, A., Lavender, P. Reisenberger, A. and Vorhaus, J. *Outcomes of adult learning: taking the debate forward*, FED/NIACE, 2000.

#### **4.4 Concerns emerging from research into non-accredited learning and analysis**

There are three threads of concern that have emerged from the recent research into non-accredited learning and analysis, so far. They are:

- What are appropriate approaches to recognising learning achievements?
- How can the quality of learning provision be assured?
- How can the latent tension between recognising achievement and quality assuring it be addressed? Will one lose out to the other?

Adding to these concerns are the issues of capacity and capability:

- Are providers able to support such systems, and can they find and train the staff to make the systems work?
- Are the financial resources (and commitment) available to do the job properly?

Building the capacity of existing and new providers to offer appropriate ACL provision that addresses all these concerns is a considerable challenge.

#### **4.5 OCN Current Practice – Addressing the Challenges**

The following examples, taken from independent evaluations of OCN projects and/or inspections of OCN accredited provision, show how OCNs have addressed some of the issues identified in our survey of the research literature.

##### **Example 1 The Credit Framework for Central London**

Evaluation of the Credit Framework for Central London (NOCN 2002) identified how attempts were made to address some of the above challenges

The aim of the project was to develop and implement a credit framework for Central London, to enable LEA contracting of voluntary and community organisations to deliver ACL. ACL providers were supported to the stage where they could deliver OCN programmes and provide a quality assured curriculum in basic skills and ICT, concurrently meeting the standards of the Common Inspection Framework (CIF) and the Further Education National Training Organisation (FENTO).

The establishment of a credit framework ensured that smaller community, black and minority ethnic and faith groups could come on stream to deliver ACL.

The programme also developed the capacity of organisations by providing a programme to train their trainers in compliance with FENTO standards and LSC requirements. With LEA involvement the credit framework was linked to other informal learning activities to provide accreditation opportunities and progression for learners. Through the training undertaken in year two the LEAs and the credit framework quality and development team ensured that only trained teachers were able to deliver programmes. Consistency in quality assurance was co-ordinated by LEAs with London Open College Network (LOCN).

LEAs worked in partnership with existing voluntary sector training networks to develop quality assurance systems within participating organisations. These networks support continuing professional development programmes for staff and share good practice to build the capacity of new organisations.

Development and maintenance of the curriculum component of the credit framework is the responsibility of LOCN. The LOCN team engaged with providers, particularly those offering non-accredited learning in the community. The engagement incorporated support activity from a development officer and quality officer to work within the organisation to help them gain centre approval to register for delivering LOCN and NOCN programmes and qualifications. The support from LOCN ensured that a quality-assured infrastructure was developed for all learning programmes. All organisations registering with LOCN had to meet the OCN's criteria, which also cross-referenced to the CIF. The project continues at the time of writing.

### **Key findings**

Both organisational and professional development strategies for the project are built on partnerships and expertise among more experienced providers. LEAs work together to quality assure provision. Different kinds of organisations are included in the network of organisations using the framework. LOCN provides the curriculum guidance and staff development and support in meeting quality assurance requirements. Learners can begin to access accreditation through informal learning opportunities. Learning that may begin as a non-accredited experience can lead to accreditation.

The benefits of using the credit framework were said to include the following:

- Participating organisations could deliver an appropriate curriculum choice to their particular learners within their own accredited programmes
- Small bites of learning were offered embedded in other informal activities that engaged new learners
- Consistency of offer could be achieved across all boroughs
- Neighbourhood renewal projects benefited by offering progression routes through the application of the credit framework

### **Example 2 The Youthtrain Programme**

The Youthtrain programme was first approved by West and North Yorkshire Open College Network (WNYOCN) in January 1997. In April 1999 the programme was recognised as a national programme by NOCN. Youthtrain is also a membership network of organisations committed to using, supporting and developing the Youthtrain programme.

The Youthtrain programme is:

- A skills-led training programme aimed at young adults, performing voluntary work in youth and community-based settings.
- A programme for young adults who are preparing to leave, or who have left, school with a deficit in the skills necessary for them to gain and maintain employment.

- An accessible and informal pathway into accredited learning that recognises the skills and talents developed, whilst working in a voluntary capacity with others, and operates at the interface between youth workers, practitioners and NOCN.

Davies and Marken in their evaluation report stated: "No systematic evidence has been collected on Youthtrain Partners' debates on the pros and cons of taking the OCN route. However, contributions to the evaluation suggest that this decision was influenced by a perception of the existing accreditation routes - for example NVQs and City and Guilds - as insufficiently user-friendly and often too preoccupied with more traditional notions of skills and the learning required for them."<sup>28</sup>

On the other hand, local OCN accreditation was viewed as:

- "Open to all and offering a wide range of units at different levels.
- More likely to guarantee progression for young people through the increasingly confusing accreditation maze.
- Operating on values and with a style which would suit a Youth Service clientele whose initial educational motivation might be very weak and who would respond best to non-formal experiential learning processes not dependant on 'book-learning' or written submissions.
- Sympathetic to the person-centred youth work principles central to Youthtrain's approach.
- Based on flexible assessment procedures with substantial opportunities for self-assessment.
- Underpinned by a strong 'bottom-up' moderation system, which meant that, 'even though it didn't depend on end testing, young people did not end up with a Mickey Mouse qualification'.
- Relatively cheap with no hidden costs."<sup>29</sup>

The willingness and flexibility of local partners to make substantial input into the design of the programme and to retain significant ownership of its delivery was also acknowledged: "Within the parameters of the OCN framework everyone was involved in designing it.... It was not institutionally imposed or marketed."<sup>30</sup>

Among a wide range of gains for the young people involved in the programme were "its encouragement to young people to 'unlearn' oppressive attitudes; think for themselves; develop a range of new skills; recognise their own potential; and build self esteem."<sup>31</sup>

## Key findings

Accrediting learning achievements made by young adults through youth work experience perhaps presents the strongest challenge to the NOCN accreditation system. Learning achievements could hardly be less predictable, the curriculum is often individually negotiated, and the context or activity the main motivator for engagement. 'Soft

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<sup>28</sup> Davies, B., Marken, M. *Evaluation of Youthtrain 2000*, Consultants Report, 1999.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

outcomes' - those learning outcomes discussed earlier in this chapter, and so fundamental to the success of youth work practice are identified and recognised through the Youthtrain programme.

The 'strong 'bottom-up' moderation system', coupled with a willingness to accept evidence of achievement other than through 'written submissions' or 'end-testing', brings together the two strengths of the NOCN approach - responsiveness in approaches to assessment, and a credible quality assurance system.

The 'style' of Youthtrain, [is] suited to learners '...who would respond best to 'non-formal experiential learning'. This suggests that it is possible to offer accredited learning to those 'whose initial educational motivation might be very weak', in a context that was not off-putting or perhaps even perceptibly 'educational'.

The strength and value of partnership comes through very strongly in the evaluation and the judgement of youth services; the fact that using NOCN was 'relatively cheap with no hidden costs' is an important one: a main concern expressed by Turner and Watters (2001) was that the 'cost of developing robust alternatives to accreditation [was] likely to be considerable', and that the 'cost of achieving compliance with quality assurance requirements may deter or exclude new providers such as community and voluntary organisations in touch with hard to reach new potential learners.'

The Youthtrain experience suggests that the NOCN approach offers providers operating in similar circumstances a way forward. Youthtrain committed itself to offering NOCN accreditation: learners were not obliged to take it up, thus fulfilling a commitment to learner and quality assurance without sacrificing an important principle.

### **Example 3 The Unlocking London's Potential Project**

The Unlocking London's Potential Project worked with the TEC, LOCN and, Enterprise Careers to develop an entry-level programme specific to the needs of 'underachievers'. The evaluation of the project stated that "For practitioners the key benefit of the project was the opportunity to give the learners some recognition, some valuing of their achievement."<sup>32</sup>

Practitioners also welcomed the opportunity they had to maintain flexibility while gaining recognition for their learners. They felt that their learners would fail an externally imposed syllabus and therefore welcomed the chance to design their own units or use those from the NOCN Pre-Foundation Progression Award, which they recognised as designed for their learners. Most practitioners found credit highly motivating for learning: "They [Learners] like the idea that they're getting to achieve something and it gives them a focus ... it gets them organised to take responsibility..."<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Carter, J. *Unlocking London's Potential through recognising a wider range of achievement at national award entry level*, Evaluation report, City University, January 1999.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.



The formal status of LOCN credit was perceived as a means of aiding learners' progression. This was expressed in psychological terms of enhanced confidence and empowerment rather than a hard requirement for selection. Voluntary sector practitioners frequently commented on the 'structure' which accreditation brought to their work:

"This understanding of how to make use of the potential structure of NOCN accreditation - the notion of a framework with meaningful routes for progression for individual learners - is a very important feature of a successful NOCN approach. One of the perceived 'constraints' of accreditation lies in the way it can lead the learning experience - the tail wagging the dog. Yet in this and other NOCN project examples quoted, a credit framework appears to provide a structure, which allows room to work on an individual basis with a young person on their needs and interests."<sup>34</sup>

## Key findings

This approach addresses the anxiety over curriculum negotiation expressed throughout the research into non-accredited learning: how far is it possible to offer a meaningful open-ended curriculum choice to the learner and develop a quality assured system to oversee the associated recognition of individual achievement? Using a credit framework, with no prescribed curriculum, but with clear routes for progression, is perhaps the best offer a learner can be made. Integrate into this the opportunity to achieve at different levels, and an imaginative approach to assessing achievement and the offer to the learner can be comprehensive, but realistic.

### Example 4 The I, too Project

The project aimed to:

- Design a curriculum based on the needs of learners and in consultation with learners
- Recognise learners' achievements wherever they take place
- Ensure quality through the application of the NOCN standards
- Support progression through local and regional networks
- Certificate and celebrate small steps of achievement that are rigorously assessed but not necessarily end-tested

Independent Evaluation of the I, too project (2001) stated:

- "Due to the flexible nature of the accreditation, parents/carers are taking up opportunities for working alongside their children and enhancing their own learning.
- Being able to take part in the assessment and evaluation of your own learning is empowering to all, tutors and learners alike.
- More involvement with NOCN through having practical experience of using NOCN programmes – community groups becoming members and individuals becoming representatives on recognition panels or becoming moderators.

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

- For some adults the credit certificates received were their first qualification, for others the qualifications [sic] led to progression into further learning or employment.
- Introducing the concept of accreditation sensitively, providing options to complete course work for accreditation was extremely important.<sup>35</sup>

### **Key findings**

In *I, too*, credit was being used to provide an overarching, unifying framework to integrate all the learning opportunities available to staff and learners.

#### **Example 5 Visiting the Elderly**

In another example, (MOCN 2000), an existing training programme, which trained volunteers to work with the elderly, was offered accreditation. The evaluation of the project described some of the benefits of offering accreditation:

“Future plans include some of the units to be extracted and turned into small introductory programmes for learners who do not want to commit themselves to a large programme. This is seen as offering a non-threatening route into a larger programme. The voluntary work will be an essential part of the programme giving learners the opportunity to reflect on their experiences.”<sup>36</sup>

### **Key findings**

Training volunteers with an offer of integrated accreditation, for learners who would be put off by the concept of enrolling on a large programme, shows the potential of the NOCN approach to offer incremental steps towards accreditation for learners using their real learning experiences as volunteers to develop skills and knowledge and recognise achievement.

#### **Example 6 Family Learning**

Over recent years, OCNs have developed learning programmes that focus on adults supporting children’s learning. The programmes operate in schools, community organisations, companies, colleges, and adult education centres; they are for parents, relatives and volunteers who want to help children learn. The programmes are diverse in their origin and operation, and all have been developed to meet local needs. A survey of practice in ‘Family Learning’ conducted by OFSTED reported that:

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<sup>35</sup> Partnership Projects Guides, *The I, Too Partnership*, Leeds Careers Guidance Project Guides, 2001.

<sup>36</sup> MOCN, *Accredited programmes in voluntary and community sector – case study, visiting the elderly*, Merseyside Open College Network, 2000.

“The curriculum for adult learners tends to rely on the syllabus for certificated programmes... Although some imaginative services have developed a full range of family-centred and parent education courses carrying OCN accreditation. These are generally more stimulating than discrete literacy courses and can equally well tackle persistent literacy difficulties through the vehicle of a broader, often practically based, curriculum. In Middlesborough, in an arts and crafts programme, it was the focus on the production of an end of course portfolio, accredited by the Teeside Region Open College Network (TROCN), involving joint work with their children in school, which lent structure and purpose to the class and the subsequent parent/children joint activity.”<sup>37</sup>

This observation provides an insight into how the constraints, associated with accredited learning in research discussed earlier, may or may not be present in any given programme of accredited learning.

### **Key findings**

While the curriculum offered to adults, '[tended] to rely on the syllabus for certificated programmes', (i.e. what sounds like a prescribed experience leading to a predetermined outcome), the 'full range of family-centred and parent education courses carrying OCN accreditation' were offered as a contrast, as exemplars of good practice in embedding the development of literacy skills.

### **Example 7 Non Participation in Lifelong Learning**

In a report researching factors affecting non-participation in lifelong learning in, learners were asked to comment on the importance of accreditation. A number of interviewees felt that the prospect of attainment of a certificate at the end of course was a good encouragement for students:

“On the computing classes, we didn't have any accreditation and people were requesting that it was an accredited course.”

“I think it's probably nice if they do [get accreditation], because they get the real sense of progress there.”

Many interviewees highlighted the need to create small steps to achievement, so that a student's progress was obvious to the student: “Acknowledging fairly small steps (of learning) would help.”

### **Key findings**

A tutor commented, “I believe there is a strong case for giving credit for what people do, not least as a tool to aid progression. OCNs provide the most effective bridge that has yet been designed between different levels of learning and different learning environments.”

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<sup>37</sup> OFSTED, *Family Learning – A survey of current practice*, OFSTED, 2000.

These snapshots of recent and current OCN projects provide useful illustrations of how OCNs and their member organisations organise themselves to make what they consider to be a different offer to learners. They have several positive features in common, which appear to address the issues and challenges emanating from the research discussed earlier in the chapter. These features are:

- OCNs can act strategically to form local partnerships across sectors to develop curriculum and offer accreditation.
- The projects cited appear to have tried to address all needs in approaching their objectives; organisations, practitioners and learners are developed as part of each project.
- The curriculum offer appears to be diverse and not prescriptive, within the bounds of possibility offered in an OCN accredited programme.
- Assessment is continuous, not based on end testing, and involves peers, whether learners or practitioners.
- Building capacity of organisations to offer ACL sustainably emerges as theme from more than one project. This may be a stated objective or an incidental benefit of collaboration.
- Progression is offered using a curriculum (OCN credit) framework.

Although the purpose of these projects was not to address the full range of issues identified in the research discussed earlier, useful messages have emerged. There is no significant evidence, for example, of how non-accredited learning achievements can be used (if required) to count towards the award of credit. Evaluation of these projects did not address how 'soft outcomes' were recognised, nor if the credit frameworks offered sufficient flexibility to allow recognition of all unplanned outcomes. However, there is an indication that practitioners were positive about the potential of such frameworks to respond to these demands. In Chapter 6 we explore how some OCN projects, specifically funded for the purpose by LLSCs, build the capacity of organisations to deliver ACL, both non-accredited and accredited.

## 4.6 Summary of Main Points

### **Developing and supporting practice in recognising achievement**

- There is a fairly substantial body of advice and information that aims to help providers and practitioners to plan, organise and conduct effective ways of recognising achievement.
- The lack of capacity of providers and practitioners to access and make use of these resources appropriately is a significant issue.

### **Valuing Achievement**

- Not all learning is measurable quantifiably. However, where 'measure' means to identify an indication of change, there is the potential to record and recognise unanticipated learning outcomes and personal development.

- Not all outcomes of learning are learning outcomes. There may be economic and social benefits that need to be recorded and recognised in a different way.
- The primary focus of public social policy may be economic and social regeneration. 'Traditional' accreditation, and non-accredited approaches to recognising individual achievements, will not register these gains, especially where they are achieved over a long period (beyond 'the course').
- In valuing achievement, there is a need to recognise collective achievement and reward it and to develop an approach that captures wider benefits of learning over time.
- Learning programmes need to be offered in such a way that learners are able to individualise curriculum content and have different levels of achievement recognised.
- It is possible to offer accredited learning to those 'whose initial educational motivation might be very weak', in a context that is not off-putting or perhaps even perceptibly 'educational'.
- Learners can begin to access OCN accreditation through informal learning opportunities.
- Learning that may begin as a non-accredited experience can lead to OCN accreditation.
- 'Soft outcomes', fundamental to the success of youth work practice, are identified and recognised by OCNs.
- "...There is a strong case for giving credit for what people do, not least as a tool to aid progression. OCNs provide the most effective bridge that has yet been designed between different levels of learning and different learning environments."

### **Proving Quality**

- The drive to provide proof of quality of provision may override the subtlety of learners' aspirations and achievements. This pressure can apply as much to non-accredited as accredited learning provision.

### **Additional lessons from OCN Current Practice**

- Evaluation reports suggest the potential of OCN-brokered partnerships to develop the capacity of member organisations to approach curriculum development and delivery supportively and effectively. For example:
  - Organisational and professional development strategies are built on partnerships and expertise among more experienced providers who work together to quality assure provision.
  - OCNs provide curriculum guidance, staff development and support to meet quality assurance requirements for different kinds of organisations in their networks.
  - OCN provision was described as 'relatively cheap with no hidden costs'.
  - Using a credit framework, with no prescribed curriculum, but with clear routes for progression, is perhaps the best offer a learner can be made

## Chapter 5 – Adult and Community Learning provision – a survey of LEA and OCN relationships

NB further details of findings from the LEAFEA survey can be found in *Appendix 1*.

The findings of the research are reported below, following the sequence in which the four elements of the research – i.e. the LEAFEA questionnaire, the follow up interviews, the telephone /e-mail interviews and the group interviews with learners – were conducted.

### 5.1 The LEAFEA Questionnaire

In order to gain background information to inform the research questions, early notification of the research was posted to the LEAFEA membership. Just over 300 questionnaires were circulated to LEAFEA members. The survey generated 64 responses, with 15 of these stating that at present they were not members of an OCN.

A summary of key findings is given below. Not all LEAs responded to every question. In this chapter findings are expressed as a percentage of the total number of LEAs who responded to the question.

LEA/OCN memberships are listed in *Appendix 1*.

#### Key Findings

- The majority of LEAs that responded were members of their local OCN. This finding is important, as there could be an assumption that much of ACL provision is non-accredited and therefore LEAs would have no need to join an OCN.
- 20% of LEAs that responded to the survey, and were members of an OCN, were members of London Open College Network. For this reason more than one LEA in membership of LOCN was interviewed in the follow up research.
- LEAs reported offering OCN accreditation in over 40 curriculum areas. However, it emerged from the survey that ICT, Arts and Crafts, Basic Skills, Family Learning and Languages were the most popular curriculum areas for OCN accreditation.
- ICT, Sports and Leisure, Basic Skills and Arts and Crafts were the most popular curriculum areas being offered without OCN accreditation.
- The majority of LEAs that responded to the survey, and were members of an OCN, offered their learners accreditation, either through OCN or another awarding body.
- 41% of LEAs that responded contracted out their provision to FE, the Workers Education Association (WEA) or a combination of both.
- The total number of learners enrolled on OCN accredited programmes in 2000-2001 among responding LEAs was 37,552.
- The majority of responses suggest these LEAs use OCNs for quality assurance and development purposes.
- 87% of LEAs that responded felt that programmes had benefited from OCN support.

- Individual experiences of OCN membership can vary quite widely among providers; however, these responses suggested that the bureaucratic burden of OCN accreditation may be off-putting for some providers, whether or not accreditation itself is judged to be in the learners' interests.
- One third of non-member LEAs that responded do not offer any accredited ACL provision. Almost a third of these LEAs are considering joining their local OCN.

Overall, the questionnaire results suggest that:

- LEAs offer accreditation, especially OCN accreditation, in a wide range of curriculum areas. Given that ACL providers are not obliged to offer accreditation, they may believe that:
  - Learners benefit from accreditation.
  - The ACL provider benefits from the accreditation process and OCN membership in improving and quality assuring ACL provision.

It may be that learners are not offered accreditation because of the bureaucratic burden they may be placed on providers, including tutorial staff. This has two effects:

- Firstly, it obscures the rationale for making (or not making) an accreditation offer.
- Secondly, it is difficult to support an 'entitlement to accreditation' argument, if accreditation bodies themselves place obstacles in the way of learners seeking accreditation.

## **5.2 Follow Up Interviews**

The research then focused on interviews with heads of LEA ACL provision, and/or those responsible for contracting out the service to other providers.

The criteria for selecting the sample for interview were LEAs offering:

- A mix of accredited and non-accredited learning
- A mix of contracted-out and in-house provision
- A mix of voluntary and community sector and FE providers
- As far as possible geographical locations across the sample
- Curriculum diversity

Face-to-face interviews were conducted with seven LEA heads of service, six with OCN member LEAs, and one with an LEA not in membership of its OCN.

The chosen format for the in-depth interviews was semi-structured. The main concern was to have the interview data complement the questionnaire data, to allow the interviewer to pursue lines of enquiry relevant to the research questions and the key findings that had emerged from the questionnaire. This allowed the interviewee to develop and express ideas and views. The interviews were on average one hour in length.

Due to the research design it was important, with permission, to make an audio recording of the interviews and also to take some additional notes. The participants all volunteered in the process by supplying examples of paperwork, which they used to assist their quality procedures.

In summary, the interview questions asked providers to explain:

- How they currently measured achievement.
- How they reviewed programmes.
- What aspects of NOCN quality assurance systems they thought could be applied to non-accredited provision.
- Questions were also asked concerning awareness of any good practice in the areas of quality development and assurance, or recording group achievement.

During the course of the interview people were encouraged to explore how their treatment of non-accredited provision (with regard to quality assurance) differed in any way from their treatment of accredited provision.

The follow up interview findings are presented in the following sections: 'Quality Assurance and Development' and 'Recognition of Achievement'. Within these sections aspects of the NOCN processes are discussed using a sub-heading, for example, 'Programme Development and Recognition'.

## **5.3 Quality Assurance and Development**

### **5.3.1 Programme development and recognition**

#### **Key findings**

- With local OCN support, LEAs created networks and partnerships, which included voluntary organisations, and designed and delivered programmes to suit local needs. Some of these programmes were accredited. The LEA that was not a member of an OCN developed its own programme and offered an in-house certificate to learners for 'small amounts' of learning.
- LLSC funds have been invested in OCN capacity-building projects between several LEAs and the voluntary sector.
- It is possible to meet NOCN quality assurance requirements using some internal quality assurance processes.
- Practitioners from member organisations share their skills and knowledge in curriculum development activities organised by OCNs.
- There are significant staff development benefits for OCN member organisations delivering ACL provision.
- OCN members exploit their membership in useful and imaginative ways, to form networks of interest and/or design new curriculum approaches.

LEA ACL providers use OCNs for quality assurance and development. Importantly, the relationship between OCNs and their members is a complex one, with the OCN providing central services as well as brokering partnerships between members to support quality development. This is significant, as OCN members use OCN networks to form communities of interest within each network. The OCN is therefore providing substantially more than a staffed central accreditation service to its membership.



### 5.3.1 Moderation

#### Key findings

- This was an area that created most concern regarding non-accredited provision. All LEAs had a system in place for observation of teaching and learning. The non-OCN member LEA was anxious that many of their systems were not formalised.
- NOCN internal moderation systems could be used to standardise assessment decisions in non-accredited learning.
- NOCN external moderation could be used to 'verify' the quality assurance of internal assessment decisions made in non-accredited learning.
- NOCN quality assurance systems need to avoid being paper-dependent and bureaucratic.
- The costs of staff development for (very) part time and/or unqualified staff may put off LEAs from using accreditation.

NOCN systems, designed for quality assuring accredited learning, were being used to support the quality assurance and development of non-accredited learning. 'Synergy' between the NOCN approach and that expected by LSC for the quality assurance of non-accredited learning is explored in Chapter 6.

### 5.3.3 Progression

#### Key findings

- There was concern that learners found appropriate exit routes from their current programme. Several LEAs provided impartial advice through adult guidance networks; however, as there was no statutory requirement to provide destination information, many LEAs did not follow up learners and did not know if learners actually progressed.
- The use of NOCN quality assurance processes was perceived as potentially contributing to clearer progression routes
- Proper destination data is needed to find out if and how learners progress.
- Consistent quality assurance systems increase confidence of local providers to accept learners progressing from other programmes.
- Providers sometimes put up barriers to learner progression. However, where progression arrangements between providers work, using OCN accreditation, there is evidence of rapid progression.

There is evidence that using an OCN provides a reliable network for progression among OCN members. Confidence is increased among members by use of a consistent OCN quality assurance system. The absence of any obligation on providers to check progression of learners is perhaps a fundamental weakness in the organisation of ACL provision. A clearer sense of what constitutes progress and progression for learners on ACL programmes, based upon an examination of good practice in OCN member progression relationships, could help to promote the value and position of ACL alongside other programmes.

### **5.3.4 Professional development**

#### **Key Finding**

Most LEAs had either no budget or a very limited budget to support professional development. They also employed a very large number of part-time sessional staff, some of whom were described as facilitators. The non-member LEA had a large number of facilitators who were trained and supported in-house. Although NOCN staff development is cited positively, there is little evidence of substantial planned and funded staff development.

There are clearly significant structural difficulties for ACL providers here, although NOCN staff development has the potential to support better delivery of ACL.

### **5.3.5 The contribution of learners to quality development of the learning programme**

#### **Key findings**

- All providers recognised this was an extremely important part of their duty as providers and would be required by CIF/ALI.
- Course reviews tended to be in the form of evaluation questionnaires, which learners completed at various stages of their programme.
- Feedback from learners on their experiences may be restrained by lack of clarity on recording their views at the same time as maintaining confidentiality.
- Learners engaged for a very short period may be reluctant to engage in any meaningful evaluation of their experiences.

How learners are engaged in curriculum development and improving learning opportunities for themselves and others perhaps requires new approaches, and even a change in the relationship between the provider, tutor and learner. New ways of asking learners what they think about their learning experiences are needed, as well as considering more active ways of engaging them in curriculum design and planning.

### **5.3.6 Programme/Contract review**

#### **Key Finding**

All LEAs paid particular attention to this aspect of their provision: most LEAs required tutors to produce lesson plans and details of how learners would be assessed; and most LEAs had developed some sort of quality checklist. The LEA that was not a member of an OCN held regular informal meetings to look at course evaluations. Those LEAs that contracted out their provision had systems in place for monitoring the contract.

There is an impression that providers, having devised 'QA checklists' and obliged staff and contractors to use them, are not quite sure when and where their use should stop. It is not clear how these checking processes contribute to quality development or improvement of provision.

### **5.3.7 The potential for use of NOCN quality assurance and development systems with provision that is currently non-accredited**

#### **Key Findings**

- LEAs believed that most providers are struggling to come up with internal quality assurance and development systems that can be applied to non-accredited courses and would benefit from input and support from NOCN.
- As LEAs very often operate in a variety of venues they would welcome a system that would promote a consistency of approach and practices by all their area centres.
- LEAs felt that most learners would like recognition for their learning.
- There was caution about the imposition of NOCN quality assurance and development systems on all ACL provision.

The potential for using NOCN systems for quality assurance and development of non-accredited learning is examined in Chapter 6.

### **5.3.8 Recognition of Achievement**

#### **Measuring achievement - key findings**

- The majority of providers are working towards a learning outcomes model with, in some cases, the use of individual learning plans.
- There is clearly interest and, in some circumstances experience, in using NOCN systems for recognising achievement to inform, support and link progress from non-accredited to accredited learning.
- Some providers are using the NOCN system to link non-accredited learning to OCN accredited provision.

#### **Initial assessment - key finding**

There are attempts to conduct some form of initial assessment in order to create the sort of individual learning programme required to meet ALI and CIF requirements. There were examples of this assessment being informal and not recorded as effectively as records kept of formal assessment.

#### **Recording of group achievement - key finding**

There have been attempts to capture common elements of programmes and record them in some way with a group document; however, there was no evidence that providers were attempting to record group processes.

See Chapter 6, example five, for an examination of an OCN accredited group achievement project.

### **5.3.8 Follow up telephone/e-mail interviews**

Following the face-to-face interviews, a further 12 telephone and/or e-mail interviews were conducted, with a random sample of the remaining respondents. The set of questions used were the same as those used in the face-to-face interviews. Responses were given code letters and the most detailed of the responses are included in *Appendix 1*. These interviews were designed to find out if the views expressed in face-to-face interviews would be corroborated using a random additional sample. Again, a semi-structured format was used.

Not every LEA surveyed responded to all questions. The responses were grouped using the following headings: measuring of achievement, provision for staff development, arrangements for moderation, and involvement of learners in the processes associated with recognition of achievement. Summaries of the responses are detailed in Appendix 1.

#### **Key finding**

These interviews did not generate any new themes and the responses followed very similar patterns to those found in the face-to-face interviews, reported above.

### **5.3.9 Group interviews with Learners**

Group interviews were conducted with three groups of learners. This was intended to reveal consensus views, generate richer responses and to determine whether the views gained through the questionnaire and interviews with heads of service were shared by learners.

Learners were interviewed at their place of learning: three ACL evening classes. The learners all formed part of the provision contracted out to a local FE college in Staffordshire. The FE college is a member of OCNWM. Some community outreach centres, which form part of the provision, offer accreditation; this particular centre did not. 42 learners participated in the group interviews.

The learners were taking part in three very different programmes of study; none of their programmes offered accreditation. The programmes of learning were Aromatherapy, Egyptology and Art. A transcript of the questions posed to learners and their responses can be found in *Appendix 1*.

#### **Key findings**

- Learners would not be put off attending a course with good quality assurance systems that offered them credit as long as there were no tests or exams (in the traditional sense) involved.

- Learners often did not have a choice between an accredited or non-accredited course because the only one offered in their locality was non-accredited, for example a very well attended (21 learners) evening class in Egyptology.
- Learners were not aware of what 'credit' was, but did know that they were working towards some learning outcomes that had either been set by their tutor, or agreed by the tutor and learners jointly.
- Most learners felt that they should have formal recognition of their learning achievements, especially if they had no previous qualifications.
- Tutors were present at the interviews but did not take part. They were asked separately if they had any knowledge or experience of NOCN accreditation.
- The part-time sessional tutors were not aware of credit. There was a perception that accreditation would involve more paperwork.

Learners' comments on accreditation suggest:

- Learners may take up an offer of accreditation provided the mode of assessment suits them and their learning.
- Learners are not always offered the choice of accreditation.
- Learners without qualifications should have formal recognition of their learning achievements through ACL.

#### **5.4 What *do* learners want?**

There appears to be a concern on the part of some providers surveyed through LEAFEA, and within the literature reviewed, that learners do not want accreditation and would find accreditation off putting. This does not match the findings of the research, either through the follow up face-to-face interviews, the telephone /e-mail interviews, or the group interviews, which offered the following perspectives.

"For learners there should be equality of access to high quality provision. There is a need to acknowledge that all learners should be entitled to have any learning acknowledged and valued by offering accreditation."

"It is easier to show what has been learnt if a learning outcomes approach is used. Most learners would like it as it provides a much more detailed description of what they have learnt."

"I think any learning can be recognised, but whether you want it to be, or whether the learner would want it to be is another matter. I think it is very much about what the learner wants and what their objectives are and if they want to do learning for progression or not. The learner that starts off saying 'I'm just doing this for fun' and then at the end of the course says 'I thought we were doing it for fun but I've really got into it and want to go on', that's the kind of flexibility you want to keep in the system."

## **Chapter 6 – The NOCN approach to quality assurance and development and recognising and recording progress and achievement in non-accredited learning**

In this Chapter we look at the main features of the NOCN process of quality assurance and development and compare them with the key elements described in the LSC's position paper *Recognising and Recording Progress and Achievement in Non-accredited Learning*<sup>38</sup>:

- "The implementation of a defined Staged Process by providers for recognising and recording progress and achievement.
- The development and implementation of a national system for validating the systems providers have in place to implement the Staged Process, to ensure that these are robust."

We then examine examples of LLSC-funded OCN projects that, in different ways, have sought to support organisations offering non-accredited learning provision and, in some cases, recognise achievements associated with non-accredited learning. The main themes emerging from the research so far are addressed in different ways by each project and have helped to frame the conclusions and recommendations found in Chapter 7.

### **6.1 The main features of the NOCN quality assurance system**

#### **6.1.1 Programme and Unit approval**

OCNs ensure that effective procedures are in operation and development support is offered for the initial approval of new learning programmes; the approval of additions to or deletions from approved programmes; the approval of new units; and the periodic review of all approved programmes. Within these systems and procedures the OCN also ensures compliance with the requirements for any NOCN qualifications, or units of NOCN qualifications, offered within approved programmes. The OCN ensures that all approval processes pay due regard to fairness and equity and are fit for their purpose of maximising opportunities for learners to have formal recognition of their achievement. All learning programmes are reviewed regularly to ensure systematic quality assurance and continuous improvement.

#### **6.1.2 Assessment**

The OCN ensures that in each approved programme the arrangements for assessment are appropriate, explicitly identified, rigorous, and assure validity, reliability, inclusiveness and equity in determining awards to learners.

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<sup>38</sup> *Recognising and Recording Progress and Achievement in Non-accredited Learning*. LSC Position Paper 2003

### **6.1.3 Moderation**

The OCN ensures that effective systems and procedures operate to internally and externally moderate evidence of learner achievement so that all awards are valid and consistent both within the OCN and benchmarked against other OCNs. Moderation also ensures programmes operate as approved and provide support for quality development and enhancement.

### **6.1.4 Licensing of OCNs**

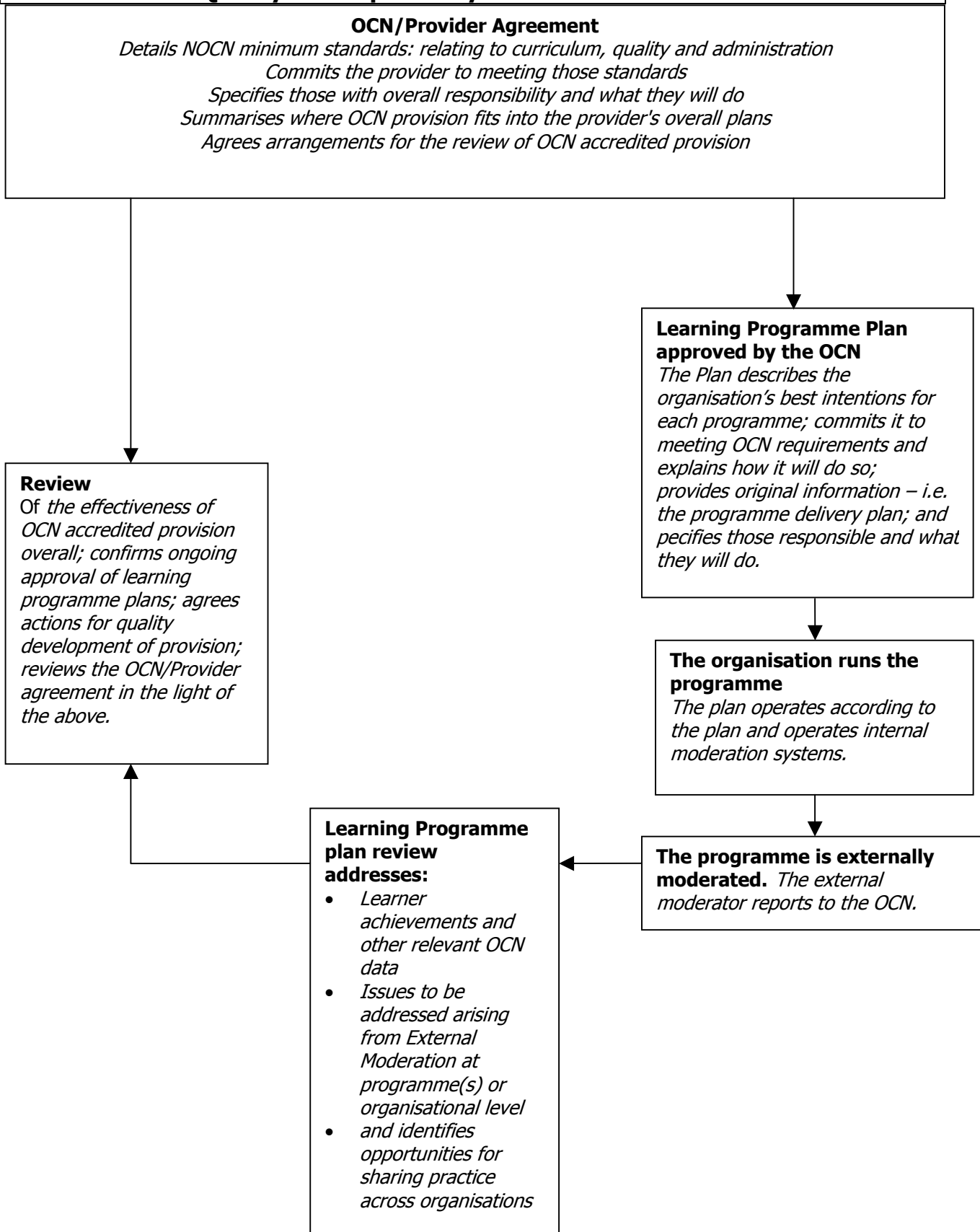
Subsequent to incorporation in 1999, NOCN published quality standards and criteria for organisations wishing to operate as OCNs. NOCN published procedures by which a licence could be achieved from NOCN. Organisations seeking a licence must comply with the NOCN published standards and criteria.

Licensing of OCNs provides an essential foundation for quality assurance; however, this does not constitute the totality of the NOCN activity in relation to quality assuring the licensed activity. NOCN engages in a range of procedures and activities designed to ensure that quality is maintained and to stimulate continuous quality improvement, including self-assessment, benchmarking, and external audit of OCNs.

## **6.2 Key elements of the NOCN Quality Development Process and LSC's position on RARPA**

All OCNs in the NOCN offer a quality assurance and quality development service to a wide range of learning providers in their local area. Providers are able to develop learning programmes with the support of a network of professional curriculum development staff. Paragraphs 6-8 of the LSC's position paper (*ibid.*) sets out the LSC's expectations concerning responsibility for monitoring and quality improvement and makes it clear that such responsibilities lie with the provider. The NOCN approach connects quality assurance and on-going quality development and works with providers to support the development of their provision. The diagram below illustrates the relationship between three key elements of the NOCN quality development process.

### 6.2.1 The NOCN Quality Development Cycle





The NOCN quality development process has been developed over time. The process continues to evolve to meet new demands and clearly has potential for application in non-accredited learning. In its position paper (ibid.) LSC outlines a proposed 'national approach' and describes the elements of the staged process proposed for use by 'all providers in receipt of LSC funding for non-accredited learning'. The staged process is consistent with CIF requirements, and is intended to: "Provide a nationally consistent and responsive approach to recognising and recording progress and achievement in ACL."

The staged process has five core elements:

- "Aims
- Initial Assessment
- Identification of appropriately challenging learning objectives
- Recognition and recording of progress and achievement during programme (formative assessment)
- End of programme learner self assessment; tutor summative assessment; review of overall progress and achievement."

The LSC also proposes a national validation system to support implementation of the staged process, which will ask providers to demonstrate they have, "A robust system in place for the implementation of the core elements in the Staged Process."

LSC states that the focus for audit would be upon "Wider Quality Assurance arrangements... [rather than on] individual learners' achievements."

Any process of 'validation and endorsement' would be the subject of research into its feasibility.

The NOCN quality development process has considerable synergy with LSC requirements and could provide a means of quality assuring and developing ACL provision, whether or not such learning leads to accreditation. This view has emerged in interviews with ACL managers (Chapter 5) and there is an indication that LEA ACL providers would welcome use of the NOCN approach and system to support quality assurance and development of their provision. The OCN provider agreement is an overarching set of mutual commitments between OCN and provider. The learning programme plan and NOCN review process address the requirements set out in the LSC's staged process.

### **6.2.2 OCN-Provider Agreement**

The OCN-Provider Agreement:

- Defines NOCN minimum requirements in relation to curriculum, quality and administration and requires the provider to make an overall commitment to meeting those requirements.
- Forms the basis of, and details the arrangements for, the review of OCN learning programmes.
- Defines the scope and limits of OCN interest in provider provision.

- Locates responsibility for the overall planning and delivery of OCN provision at the appropriate level in the provider organisation.
- Establishes a strategic relationship between the OCN and provider from the outset, irrespective of the number and range of programmes offered by the provider.
- Offers the opportunity to promote the positive benefits of the OCN approach to quality assurance and development at a senior level in the organisation.
- Supports, adds value to, and does not duplicate the content of, inspection and audit requirements.
- Provides documentary evidence of planning and quality development for evaluation, inspection and audit purposes.
- Addresses key questions with providers once, rather than repeatedly at programme level.
- Is written in plain English.

### **6.2.3 The Learning Programme Plan**

The Learning Programme Plan:

- Identifies and articulates the learning programme, providing the basis for recognition of learner achievement.
- Enhances and adds value to the planning and delivery of learning programmes.
- Affirms and builds upon all that is best in OCN practice.
- Secures pre-delivery quality assurance commitment and post-approval quality development.
- Ensures that all programmes meet the same national standards, whether designed for national use, local use, or eventual transfer across OCNs.
- Responds to the wide range of ways organisations, their centres and their partners design and deliver programmes in different localities, regions and countries.
- Is written in plain English.

### **6.2.4 Review**

Review of a provider's learning programme plan (or plans) makes use of:

- All OCN external moderator reports
- Evidence from available data including learner registrations and awards

The purpose of review is to foster quality development by:

- Informing development planning
- Determining the effectiveness of internal moderation systems and quality assurance across all accredited provision for that provider
- Assessing the quality of learner experience
- Discussing learner achievements

### **6.2.5 Relationship of planning frameworks (including the CIF) to the NOCN quality development process**

In paragraph 9 of its position paper (ibid.) LSC drew attention to the weaknesses of ACL provision highlighted by ALI pilot inspections (op.cit. Chapter 4).

NOCN has taken account of the central requirements of the CIF in devising the common programme development process. While the CIF is currently the most significant planning/inspection framework used by LSC-funded providers, we know that there are many others in use. NOCN will working to secure support from LSC in England (and their equivalents in the other UK countries) by showing that the N/OCN programme development process can:

- Provide external evidence to support the provider's self-assessment activity
- Assist the provider in the process of quality development

### **6.2.6 Implementation**

OCNs use a simple on screen 'front end' to develop the OCN-Provider Agreement and Learning Programme Plan.

OCNs use their expertise and experience to help providers meet OCN requirements and design learning programmes. Both providers and OCNs use linked web-based information advice and guidance to respond to the OCN-provider agreement and the Learning Programme Plan. This includes access to units through the NOCN database.

Providers are expected to meet NOCN requirements and provide additional information in proportion to the scale and complexity of the learning programme(s) being designed.

NOCN sets requirements and gathers high quality up-to-date information from providers, OCNs and national sources to support the design of learning programmes. This ensures that NOCN:

- Makes best use of expertise and experience in the national network.
- Frames the professional development plan for OCN staff and helps to inform the professional development of provider staff.
- Benchmarks best practice to foster quality development.

The diagram in *Appendix 2* shows the relationship between the NOCN quality development process and the diversity of approaches to designing learning programmes through OCNs.

## **6.3 OCN projects supporting non-accredited learning**

How do OCNs use the quality assurance and development process to support provision of non-accredited learning?

This section summarises those current key developments across the national network of OCNs that relate directly to the key questions addressed in our research. Indeed, by funding each of the projects described below, LLSCs are acknowledging the potential of the NOCN approach to assure the quality of ACL (and other traditionally non-accredited learning provision).

### **6.3.1 OCN(NELH) quality mark system**

The objectives for the Open College Network (North East London and Hertfordshire) to develop and market a “Quality Marking” system included:

- Support for organisational capacity-building.
- Provision of an objective, external and peer-referenced assessment of the quality of non-accredited learning, including judgements on how well that learning programme meets its intended aims and outcomes, the ‘distance travelled’ by participants and the organisations’ ability to support the provision.

These objectives are complementary to the requirements of CIF and LSC strategic priorities. ‘Quality Marking’ can assure both learners and funders of a quality provision where accreditation for learners is not sought as an outcome.

In the longer term, the developmental and capacity building elements of ‘Quality Marking’ could enable some organisations to become interested in accrediting learner achievement and to be better equipped to do so, through confidence gained through the process and ongoing support from the OCN.

### **6.2 South of England OCN quality mark pilot**

#### **The project aimed to:**

- Develop materials and quality standards for the Quality Mark submission
- Bring three organisations within Brighton and Hove to approved status within three months
- Evaluate the value and process of ‘quality marking’
- Make recommendations for development of the SEOCN Quality Mark across Brighton and Hove and pan-Sussex

Both organisations involved in the SEOCN project were gathering evidence against the quality mark standards in one or more programmes in ALI curriculum area 6 (Information and Communications Technology).

#### **Development of materials**

A checklist was drawn up in plain English, of questions relating to the recruitment, selection, planning, delivery and evaluation processes. The checklist cited examples of a range of documents where appropriate evidence may be found. The checklist mirrored CIF requirements.

## **QM standards**

QM standards were also developed in the early stages of the pilot. It was important that these standards could be understood by all organisations that wished to take part in the scheme and should not put up barriers. The OCN development team were mindful that these standards remained as rigorous as those used in the accreditation of programmes scheme and that the language should clarify what was required, rather than suggest lower quality standards for non-accredited provision.

### **Initial assessment of an organisation's quality assurance system in relation to the requirements of the quality mark**

This had two strands: the completion of a checklist and a visit to discuss systems. The checklist could be completed by the organisation as a precursor to an organised visit, or as a discussion tool to be used during a preliminary visit by a SEOCN development officer. Initial discussion with a representative from the organisation was meant to elicit the most appropriate approach.

### **Lessons learnt from the pilot:**

- Research and evaluation suggested short timescales, low capacity within organisations for strategic development and a need to understand and engage in wider quality issues around self-assessment and review, which are major blocks to organisational development of quality in provision for clients.
- The system has to be flexible to allow for the varying stages of development of organisations.
- For some organisations a longer time frame with developmental work and training will be required.
- The system needs to be user 'friendly' and time needs to be allocated to allow organisations to develop their understanding of the process of a quality audit.
- An induction session into the Quality Mark would help organisations decide whether this was appropriate for them and to make a realistic decision based on the information and time available. The meeting of other organisations at this induction would help ease any isolation during the process.
- Large-scale interest established across all three LEAs pan-Sussex and with several community organisations and private training providers (existing members of SEOCN).

### **6.3.3 LOCN quality mark service**

In 2002 LOCN began piloting a 'Quality Mark' service based upon approval of the following information from organisations:

- An overview of the organisation and its portfolio of provision.
- Aims/purpose/rationale for provision.
- Content and structure of delivery/programme management.

- Arrangements for recruitment, induction and ensuring the provision is appropriate for the learners.
- Arrangements for learner support, including progression and learner feedback.
- Evidence of working towards high levels of retention and achievement (however that is defined).
- Evidence of equal opportunities policy and monitoring.
- Staffing is appropriate/arrangements for staff development and appraisal
- Internal quality assurance/self-assessment/measuring of achievement.
- Learning resources and accommodation.

OCN officers then develop more detailed criteria and requirements against each heading. The detailed criteria to be based upon and mapped against OCN programme approval standards, OCN Centre Approval standards, CIF standards, and the eligibility criteria for non-accredited learning developed by Turner in *Squaring the Circle* (NIACE 2001)

#### **6.3.4 OCNWM quality assurance framework**

OCN West Midlands has, with member organisations, developed a quality assurance framework to support the *Wolverhampton Passport to Learning* across the range of further education provision to support entry and progression of adult learners into wider learning opportunities. The framework operates through a partnership providers of adult learners and includes the Adult Education Service, the College of Further Education and community and voluntary providers.

The aim of the framework is to support cohesive and coherent non-accredited provision in partnership, which encourages seamless movement of learners into other learning programmes and improves the retention, participation and progression of learners involved in the framework.

The *Passport to Learning* identifies a set of generic learning outcomes that can be applied to all forms of learning activities, programme content and venues, in a variety of contexts. The learning outcomes are mapped against a template of key skills and include problem-solving, communications, working with others and number skills. The *Passport to Learning* contains a checklist of teaching/learning styles against which learners and tutors can explore what works for them based on past experience and learning goals.

The *Passport to Learning* offers consistent high-quality provision of learning to adults, especially those who have previously been excluded, to provide feedback to learners about their progress and to support their progression into further learning, voluntary or community activity, personal development and employment.

The *Passport to Learning* was initially piloted in Wolverhampton through a partnership of the Adult Education Service and the local college. A range of positive outcomes was identified in the evaluation. The main benefits of the *Passport* (widely recognised as representing good practice) are seen as opportunities for:

- Significant learner involvement in *negotiation of curriculum*
- Learners to reflect on past experiences and *identify 'blockages'*

- Learners to discover their *preferred learning style*
- Building *effective relationships* and group solidarity
- Learners to focus on *setting targets and goals*
- Relating life experiences to learning activity
- Enabling learners to be aware of their generic skills and abilities
- Recording and *tracking learners' progress* through the learning process
- Screening for and *identifying basic skills needs*
- Capturing individual learning experiences in an unmediated way

An important lesson learned through the pilot was that it is essential that tutors have a clear understanding of the purpose and use of the *Passport* document, especially of the process involved in using the document as part of the learning activity, and not see it as an end in itself. Therefore, significant staff development would be required to underpin the development and operation of the *Passport to Learning*.

To make transparent the quality and consistency of what was provided through the *Passport*, it was proposed that the framework through which the Passport was managed, delivered and assessed should be externally validated through the local OCN. Therefore, the *Passport* framework was submitted to an OCN peer group panel process to consider and approve the arrangements for delivery. This will address in the first instance:

- Target groups
- Guidance and assessment processes
- Teaching/learning methods
- The appropriateness of learning outcomes to the target groups
- Initial diagnosis and tracking of learner progress
- Management and staff development support
- Quality assurance systems
- Monitoring and review arrangements at centre level and across the city

### **6.3.5 Recognising group achievement**

The following summary of the South Yorkshire Group Achievement project (2002), developed by the Northern College and OCN South Yorkshire and Humberside Region (OCNSYHR) illustrates how NOCN approach to accreditation could work to recognise group achievement. (Academic references used by the Group/Collective Credit report are cited in the bibliography as other sources.) The following is an extract from the project report summary.

#### **Background**

The LSC Local Initiative Fund provided an opportunity for collaborative work between the Northern College and OCN: Northern College provided the components of recruitment, delivery and assessment of learning; the OCN developed the units of assessment, a model of moderation, moderation documents, a database system for recording and tracking learners and a certificate for the award of credit.

Adults' first experiences of learning may often be as part of a group. Consideration of the potential and possibilities of group credit goes back almost as far as the developments of OCNs themselves. The notion that groups using community development work approaches could gain credit seemed a natural extension of the emerging OCN ethos.

There have been numerous studies conducted relating to the dynamics of groups and the pursuit of common goals. (Sherif et al, 1961; Cloreat et al, 1978; Slavin and Madden, 1979; Brown, 1996) (op.cit.) These studies conclude that engaging in co-operative tasks and super ordinate goals can have a cohesive effect on groups. Aronson (1992) (op.cit.) set tasks that required co-operation in order to be completed and found that students showed an increase in self-esteem, academic performance and better liking for their fellow learners. Applying this to group accreditation, where there is a common goal that is negotiated by the group itself, seems to have clear outcomes in terms of the development of self-esteem and the increased confidence in the ability to learn.

Group accreditation has been used in HE, but it seems to recognise the achievements of individuals working *in* groups as opposed to individuals working *as* a group. It was important to make this distinction and was applied to groups being put forward for the group accreditation award.

One of the concerns relating to group accreditation surrounds conflict in the group. It can be argued that conflict is a part of the natural process: Schacter (1951) found that when a member deviates from the norms of the group, other members increase their rate of communication in order to persuade them to 'fall back in line', so conflict can be seen as having a positive effect in the long term.

## **Defining group achievement**

The project felt that a definition that concentrated on group work and group dynamics placed too much emphasis on inter-personal activity between the members, so a definition that saw collective learning as a group working towards group goals was used.

The following definition of group credit was adopted: 'Genuinely collective learning where group process, collective endeavour and close interaction are part of the natural and appropriate style of delivery and assessment. Its purpose and intentions must be clearly differentiated from individual achievement.'

## **Units of assessment**

Units of assessment were developed at Levels One and Two. The learning outcomes focused on were generic and designed to meet 'genuinely collective endeavour... clearly differentiated from individual achievement.'

The learning outcomes focused on:

- Aims and objectives of the group learning process



- How the group learning process provided a mechanism for working towards the objectives
- The group's ability to reflect on the achievement of the stated aims and objectives

## **Assessment and moderation**

Assessment in any OCN programme should be valid, reliable, appropriate to the target group and fit for purpose. With this in mind OCNSYH and Northern College jointly developed:

- An Assessment strategy
- Methods of recording assessment
- A model for moderation
- Ideas of appropriate evidence of achievement

This was backed up by a joint staff development session, which included delivering tutors, OCN officers and moderators. This provided a forum for sharing and developing ideas, models and processes.

## **Assessment strategy**

There was a need to have a clear way of recording assessment and cross-referencing the evidence to the Learning Outcomes and Assessment strategy.

## **Moderators**

Two moderators were appointed because they had specific experience in community and work place settings. The moderators used their experience to adapt to the new context where the evidence of learning is collective and not individualised.

## **Delivery**

The group accreditation units were delivered to 10 groups at Northern College. The sample included:

- A group for people with mental health problems
- A community forum
- A Mencap group
- A group for older people seeking to improve services for their age group
- A group that was part of a homeless project
- A group of Asian women focusing on developing skills for work
- A 'supporting the supporters' group
- Another group interested in preparing themselves to return to work
- A group of tutors working on a joint project
- A collection of groups from the Burngreave area of Sheffield

The groups were required to concentrate on the process of their learning in ways that were often new and challenging.

## Certification

Certification could take two forms: a group certificate outlining the level and credit value of the learning achievement; or individual certificates stating that a participant had contributed with others to a learning achievement valued at x credits at y level.

## Conclusions

The likelihood that few currently-recognised programmes would take up the facility for offering group credit should not deter further examination of the idea. There are a number of good reasons suggested in the report why further exploration should be encouraged. All of those who participated in the project felt very positive about its process and outcomes.

The key recommendations for the future use of group credit were as follows:

- Development of an NOCN programme
- To negotiate appropriate funding with the LSC
- To develop the use of group credit in the workforce context
- A national conference to disseminate findings

## 6.4 Summary of Main Points

- There is significant synergy between LSC's proposed quality assurance requirements for ACL providers and the potential of NOCN's quality development process to assure, validate and develop the quality of ACL provision.
- There is the potential, supported by evidence from interviews with ACL managers (Chapter 5), to investigate how NOCN credit principles might be applied outside the NQF, responding to key elements of the LSC Position Paper 'Recognising and Recording Progress in Non-Accredited Achievement' (the Staged Process, and national system for validation).
- OCN projects cited addressed the needs of ACL providers, providers, practitioners and learners, offering a quality assurance framework and organisational, staff and curriculum development by providing:
  - Support for organisational capacity building
  - Provision of an objective, external, and peer-referenced assessment of the quality of non-accredited learning, including judgements on how well that learning programme meets its intended aims and outcomes, the 'distance travelled' by participants, and the organisation's ability to support the provision.
- OCN projects cited also enabled:
  - Significant learner involvement in negotiation of curriculum
  - Learners to reflect on past experiences and identify 'blockages'

- Learners to discover their preferred learning style
- The building of effective relationships and group solidarity
- Learners to focus on setting targets and goals
- Learners to relate life experiences to learning activity
- Learners to be aware of their generic skills and abilities
- The recording and tracking of learners' progress through the learning process
- The screening for and identifying of basic skills needs
- Individual learning experiences to be captured in an unmediated way
- One project was able to define and recognise group achievement, and for the purpose develop:
  - An assessment strategy
  - Methods of recording assessment
  - A model for moderation
  - Ideas of appropriate evidence of achievement

## Chapter 7 – Conclusions and recommendations

There are a significant number of conclusions arising from this research project. We have collected and summarised them around the following themes:

1. The impact of Government intervention in recognising the learning achievements of adults.
2. Language, meaning and understanding, and the recognition of learning achievements.
3. Building the capacity and capability of providers to deliver ACL and meet standards.
4. Quality assurance and development.
5. Recognition of achievement.
6. Learner involvement and learner choice.
7. OCNs and the value of partnership.
8. The value of NOCN credit frameworks for learner choice and progression.

Recommendations have been included where appropriate.

### 7.1 The impact of Government intervention in recognising the learning achievements of adults

#### Conclusions

Government intervention in recognising the learning achievements of adults continues to exert a substantial influence on practice and is driven by different and perhaps sometimes competing factors, including:

- The desire to measure the learning achievements of individuals and the primacy of the NQF for this purpose.
- The demand to measure the achievements of education providers.
- The desire to offer an inclusive curriculum to the 'disadvantaged and excluded' for the sake of social cohesion (and/or improved economic performance).
- The demand to prove public money is being spent appropriately.
- The primacy of prescribed literacy and numeracy skills and qualifications in the Government's adult learning strategy.
- The absence of clear success criteria for learning and learning achievements judged crucial to the success of public social policy.
- Whether learning for the sake of it should be funded, or not.
- How further education should be funded

## **7.2 Language, meaning and understanding, and the recognition of learning achievements.**

### **Conclusions**

- There is a wide range of terminology and language associated with recognition of achievement and accreditation.
- Inconsistency in use of language in the field has inhibited our research and, more importantly, inhibits proper public debate and discussion of issues and ideas relating to recognition of achievement.
- Different interpretations of the terms 'qualifications', 'awards', 'accredited and non-accredited learning' may have led to less subtle distinctions being made between each category than actually exists in practice.
- A common language for recognition of achievement and accreditation would enable effective discussion and development of theory and practice to take place.

### **Recommendation**

The research community needs to work with key stakeholders to develop and promote adoption of a common understanding and interpretation of the language and terminology used by all in relation to the recognition of learning achievement.

## **7.3 Building the capacity and capability of providers to deliver ACL and meet standards.**

### **Conclusions**

- There is a fairly substantial body of advice and information that aims to help providers and practitioners to plan, organise and conduct effective ways of recognising achievement. However, the lack of capacity of providers and practitioners to access and make use of these resources appropriately is a significant issue.
- Evaluation reports suggest the potential of OCN-brokered partnerships to develop the capacity of member organisations to approach curriculum development and delivery supportively and effectively.
- Snapshots of recent and current OCN projects provide useful illustrations of how OCNs and their member organisations organise themselves to make what they consider to be a different offer to learners. They have several positive features in common which appear to address the issues and challenges emanating from the research discussed earlier in the chapter. These features are:
  - OCNs can act strategically to form local partnerships across sectors to develop curriculum and offer accreditation.
  - The projects cited appear to have tried to address all needs in approaching their objectives: organisations, practitioners and learners are developed as part of each project.

- The curriculum offer appears to be diverse and not prescriptive within the bounds of possibility offered in an OCN accredited programme.
- Assessment is continuous, not based on end testing, and involves peers, whether learners or practitioners.
- Building capacity of organisations to offer ACL sustainably emerges as themes from more than one project. This may be a stated objective or an incidental benefit of collaboration.
- Progression is offered using a curriculum (OCN credit) framework.
- LEAs had either no budget, or a very limited budget, to support professional development.
- The costs of staff development for (very) part time and/or unqualified staff may put off LEAs from using accreditation.
- There are significant staff development benefits for LEA OCN members delivering ACL provision.
- Individual experiences of OCN membership can vary quite widely among LEA ACL providers. However, these responses suggested that the bureaucratic burden of OCN accreditation may be off-putting for some providers, whether or not accreditation itself is judged to be in the learners' interests.
- NOCN quality assurance systems need to avoid being paper dependent and bureaucratic.
- Although NOCN staff development is cited positively, there is little evidence of substantial planned and funded staff development.
- There is an impression that providers, having devised 'quality assurance checklists' and obliged staff and contractors to use them, are not quite sure when and where their use should stop. It is not clear how these checking processes contribute to quality development or improvement of provision.

## Recommendations

- LSC needs to develop a capacity building strategy that will enable current and new ACL providers to deliver high quality ACL provision sustainably.
- The DfES Standards Unit should consider how OCNs can contribute to long term capacity building of organisations delivering publicly funded learning opportunities, particularly non-traditional providers.
- NOCN should continue to work to reduce the bureaucratic burden on providers, practitioners and learners.

## 7.4 Quality Assurance and Development

### Conclusions

- The drive to provide proof of quality of provision may override the subtlety of learners' aspirations and achievements. This pressure can apply as much to non-accredited as accredited learning provision.

- LEAs believed that most providers are struggling to come up with internal quality assurance and development systems that can be applied to non-accredited courses and would benefit from input and support from NOCN.
- Responsibility for moderation (both internal and external) created the most anxiety where non-accredited provision was concerned. The LEA that was not a member of OCN had anxieties concerning the adequacies of their systems, as many of their processes were not formalised.
- NOCN internal moderation systems could be used to standardise assessment decisions in non-accredited learning.
- NOCN external moderation could be used to 'verify' the quality assurance of internal assessment decisions made in non-accredited learning.
- The majority of LEAs that responded to the LEA FEA questionnaire were members of their local OCN:
  - Many used OCNs for quality assurance and development purposes.
  - 87% felt that programmes had benefited from OCN support.
  - Almost a third of non-OCN member LEAs that responded are considering joining their local OCN.
- Imposed systems of quality assurance could have a reductive effect on learning and learners. At least in NOCN's case, tutors, practitioners and the research community can and should challenge the NOCN approach to evolve and develop new approaches to accreditation.
- There was caution about the imposition of NOCN quality assurance and development systems on all ACL provision.
- There is significant synergy between LSC's proposed quality assurance requirements for ACL providers and the potential of NOCNs quality development process to assure, validate and develop the quality of ACL provision.

## Recommendations

- Develop greater synergy between resources invested in ACL quality improvement by NIACE and LSDA and the quality development strategy and actions of NOCN.
- NOCN to work with LSC to identify ways of making best use of the NOCN system and approach to quality development, for ACL providers and provision.

## 7.5 Recognition of achievement

### Conclusions

- There is no pedagogic difference between learning achievements that can be recognised by an external accreditation body and those that might be recognised internally, i.e. by tutors and practitioners themselves. There may be limits to what learning should be recognised or limitations in systems that recognise achievement.
- Not all learning is measurable quantifiably. However, where 'measure' means to identify an indication of change there is the potential to record and recognise unanticipated learning outcomes and personal development.

- Not all outcomes of learning are learning outcomes. There may be economic and social benefits that need to be recorded and recognised in a different way.
- The primary focus of public social policy may be economic and social regeneration. 'Traditional' accreditation, and non-accredited approaches to recognising individual achievements, will not register these gains, especially where they are achieved over a long period (beyond 'the course').
- In valuing achievement, there is a need to recognise collective achievement and reward it and to develop an approach that captures wider benefits of learning over time.
- Resistance to accreditation may be symptomatic of lack of confidence in tutors' ability to assess achievement.
- It is possible to formally recognise and certificate learning achievements characterised as soft outcomes.
- It is possible to recognise and give credit for group achievements in the ways defined by the Northern College and Open College Network South Yorkshire and Humberside study.
- The majority of LEAs surveyed in OCN membership offered their learners accreditation, either through OCN or another awarding body.
- The majority of LEA ACL providers are working towards a learning outcomes model with, in some cases, the use of individual learning plans.
- There is clearly interest, and in some circumstances experience, among LEA OCN members, in using NOCN systems for recognising achievement to inform, support and link progress from non-accredited to accredited learning.
- Some LEA ACL providers are using the NOCN system to link non-accredited learning to OCN accredited provision.
- There are attempts to conduct some form of initial assessment in order to create the sort of individual learning programme required to meet ALI and CIF requirements. There were examples of this assessment being informal and not recorded as well as more formal assessment where written records were kept.

## Recommendations

- Key stakeholders should work together to promote a wider discourse on assessment issues and significantly improve clarity and guidance on approaches to assessing achievement.
- LEA ACL providers should be encouraged to make better use of the NOCN approach to quality development to share and improve practice in assessing achievement.
- LEA ACL providers should be encouraged to challenge and improve NOCN systems for assessing and recognising achievement.
- Improve and share practice in assessment systematically at a local level, using existing well-established OCN networks.
- NOCN to adopt the definition of group credit from the OCNSYH and Northern College Study report. NOCN should pilot the use of this approach to recognising group achievement across the national network of OCNs.
- NOCN should negotiate an appropriate funding mechanism with national funding bodies for group accreditation.



- NOCN and NIACE to support the Northern College and Open College Network South Yorkshire and Humberside group achievement project dissemination strategy.

## 7.6 Learner involvement and learner choice

### Conclusions

- Learning programmes need to be offered in such a way that learners are able to individualise curriculum content and have different levels of achievement recognised.
- Learners say they would not be put off attending a course with good quality assurance systems that offered them credit, as long as there were no tests or exams (in the traditional sense) involved.
- Learners surveyed often did not have a choice between an accredited or non-accredited course because the only one offered in their locality was non-accredited, for example a very well attended (21 learners) evening class in Egyptology.
- Learners surveyed were not aware of what 'credit' is, but did know that they were working towards some learning outcomes that had either been set by their tutor or agreed by the tutor and learners jointly.
- Most learners surveyed felt that they should have formal recognition of their learning achievements, especially if they had no previous qualifications.
- Part-time sessional tutors surveyed were not aware of credit. There was a perception that accreditation would involve more paperwork.
- This quotation epitomises the views of a number of LEAs interviewed in the LEA FEA the survey: "For learners there should be equality of access to high quality provision. There is a need to acknowledge that all learners should be entitled to have any learning acknowledged and valued by offering accreditation."

### Recommendation

Successful examples of learner involvement in designing and quality developing learning provision that can lead to recognition of achievement should be identified and shared.

## 7.7 OCNs and the value of partnership

### Conclusions

- The strength of OCN networks to act as sources to broker and develop partnerships is clear throughout.
- In terms of programme recognition and development, with the support of their local OCN, LEAs created networks and partnerships that included voluntary organisations and delivered accredited programmes to suit local needs.
- NOCN accreditation provides parity of status amongst all stakeholders, whatever their power relationships: the accreditation system is both common to and external from all organisations using it.

- LEA OCN members have their own ideas of how to make the best of OCN membership: to form networks of interest, and/or design new curriculum approaches.

## **Recommendations**

- NOCN should promote the purpose and value of OCN membership to ACL providers/contractors. NOCN should do this strategically, both in consort with national organisations and networks, and through OCNs, with regional and sub-regional networks of LEAs.
- NOCN needs to take steps to raise awareness of its organisation and services across LEAs offering or contracting out ACL provision.

## **7.8 The value of NOCN credit frameworks for learner choice and progression**

### **Conclusions**

- There is significant value in credit frameworks with clear progression routes for learners. Credit frameworks provide a comprehensive and realistic choice to learners and an excellent basis for curriculum negotiation between practitioners and learners.
- The use of NOCN quality assurance processes was perceived as potentially contributing to clearer progression opportunities and entitlements because 'gatekeepers', such as FE colleges, understood the OCN accreditation system.
- Providers sometimes put up barriers to learner progression. However where progression arrangements between providers work, using OCN accreditation, there is evidence of rapid progression.

### **Recommendations**

- NOCN should ensure that LEAs are involved in the development of the new NOCN Credit and Qualifications Framework.
- NOCN should work with key stakeholders to develop an understanding through practice of the value and purpose of credit frameworks for learner progression and choice.

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## Glossary of terms

### Abbreviations used in the report

**ACL – Adult and Community Learning** - “For the purposes of this circular, Adult and Community Learning (ACL) is learning activity secured by Local Education Authorities (LEAs) and funded by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC). In the main it is provision that was the responsibility of LEAs under the *Further and Higher Education Act 1992*, often described as ‘non schedule 2’. It encompasses a diverse range of learning activities that are predominantly non-accredited and specifically relate to the block grant currently allocated to LEAs for ACL under the guarantee from the Secretary of State of a minimum level of funding until the end of 2002/03 (31<sup>st</sup> July 2003), subject to the submission of a satisfactory adult learning plan.” LSC, ‘Consultation on Arrangements for Funding Adult and Community Learning 2003/04’ (LSC(c), September 2002).

**ALI – Adult Learning Inspectorate** - The Adult Learning Inspectorate reports, both to the Secretary of State for Education and the public, on the quality of education and training received by adult learners and young people in England. The ALI is responsible for inspecting all publicly funded work-based training for people over 16 and learning for post-19s.

**ABIs – Area Based Initiatives** - Area Based Initiatives (ABIs) are publicly funded initiatives targeted on areas of social or economic disadvantage, which aim to improve the quality of life of residents and/or their future life chances and those of their children. They have one or more of the following features:

- Aimed at particular geographical areas, or intended to have a greater impact in some areas or regions than others;
- Managed through regional, sub-regional or local partnerships;
- Intended to support a number of objectives locally which are the responsibility of more than one Department;
- Put forward as pilots or pathfinders for programmes that will ultimately be rolled out nationally.

At the time of writing, there were over forty ABIs listed at <http://www.rcu.gov.uk/abi>

**CIF – Common Inspection Framework** - The Framework has been used by ALI and OFSTED since 1 April 2001 for inspections of sixth form colleges, further education colleges, work-based learning, the New Deal, adult and community learning and the University for Industry.

**FENTO – Further Education National Training Organisation** - The Further Educational National Training Organisation is the national lead body for the development, quality assurance and promotion of national standards for the FE sector. FENTO is currently working with partner organisations across the Learning and Skills sector to form a Post-16 Sector Skills Council.

**Fundable** – learning provision that might attract funding from the LSC under the Learning and Skills Act 2001.

**Further Education** – throughout the report includes what is now referred to as ACL.

**Gos – Government Offices for the Regions** - Government Offices are key agents of Government for the English Regions, ensuring effective delivery of Government programmes regionally and locally. They work with regional partners, including local authorities, Regional Development Agencies and other organisations, to achieve the Government’s aims in a joined up way.

**LEA – Local Education Authority**

**LEAFEA – Local Education Authorities Forum for the Education of Adults**

**LGA – Local Government Association** - The Local Government Association was formed on 1 April 1997 and represents the local authorities of England and Wales – a total of just under 500 authorities.

**LLSC – Local Learning and Skills Council** - there are 47 LLSCs in England, each representing the Learning and Skills Council at a local level.

**LSC – Learning and Skills Council** - The Learning and Skills Council (LSC) is responsible for funding and planning education and training for over 16-year-olds in England.

**LSDA – Learning and Skills Development Agency** - The Learning and Skills Development Agency is a strategic national resource for the development of policy and practice in post-16 education and training. The Agency was previously known as the Further Education Development Agency (FEDA).

**NIACE** – National Institute for Adult Continuing Education – a non-government organisation for adult learning in England and Wales, which aims to promote the study and general advancement of adult continuing education.

**NOCN – National Open College Network** – a recognised national qualification awarding body and is the central organisation for 28 Open College Networks (OCNs) based across the UK. NOCN provides national qualifications and programmes in a wide range of subject areas and offers a local accreditation service through the OCNs. NOCN aims to widen participation and access to high quality and flexible education, training and learning, to promote social inclusion and to ensure that learner achievement is recognised, valued and understood through a national framework of accreditation.

**NQF – National Qualifications Framework** – developed by QCA, CCEA and ACCAC to guarantee quality and standards for qualifications.

**OCN – Open College Network** – OCNs are local, not-for-profit organisations, committed to providing a flexible and responsive local accreditation service for a wide range of learning activities.

**ODPM – Office of the Deputy Prime Minister** - ODPM was created as a central department in its own right in May 2002. It is responsible for policy on housing, planning, devolution, regional and local government and the fire service. It also takes responsibility for the Social Exclusion Unit, the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit and the Government Offices for the Regions.

**Other provision** - 'other provision' is all other provision, which does not appear on the section 96 and 97 lists of accredited qualifications, externally accredited or not, and which is funded under the Learning and Skills Act 2001.

**QCA – Qualifications and Curriculum Authority** – works with others to maintain and develop the school curriculum and associated assessments, and to accredit and monitor qualifications in schools, colleges and at work.

**RCU – Regional Co-ordination Unit** – the unit aims to consider Government initiatives with a regional or local dimension (Area Based Initiatives – ABIs); promote closer links between Government activity in the regions and the centre; and manage the Government Offices (GOs).

**Section 96 and 97** – often referred to as the 'section 96 and 97' lists of accredited qualifications, each section referring to sections of the Learning and Skills Act 2001, which designated the age group for which such qualifications were approved by the Secretary of State.

**WEA** - The Workers' Educational Association (WEA) is the UK's largest voluntary provider of adult education. Ever since it was founded in 1903, in order to support the educational needs of working men and women, the WEA has maintained its commitment to provide access to education and learning for adults from all backgrounds, and in particular those who have previously missed out on education.

### Definitions devised for this study

**Accreditation (of learning achievement or 'gain')**: recognition of learning achievement which leads to the award of a certificate by an external accreditation body (e.g. An Open College Network, National Open College Network, City and Guilds)

**Non-accreditation (of learning achievement or 'gain')**: learning which does not lead to recognition of learning achievement by an external accreditation body

**A qualification**: 'A specification accredited into the National Qualifications Framework, which can demonstrate that it meets the appropriate criteria and codes of practice set by



the regulatory authorities. It can only be offered by an Awarding Body accredited by the regulatory authorities, or by a Higher Education Institution.'

**Measure:** (verb) to indicate (change, progress)

**Measurement:** (noun) an indication of change or progress

**Further Education:** Post compulsory education and training publicly funded by the State including ACL, but not including Higher Education.

### Definitions taken from the Memorandum on Lifelong Learning

On 21 November 2001, the European Commission adopted a Communication on Making a European Area of Lifelong Learning a Reality, and a produced A Memorandum on Lifelong Learning.

The following definitions are taken from the Memorandum and used in this report:

**Formal learning** takes place in education and training institutions, leading to recognised diplomas and qualifications.

**Non-formal learning** takes place alongside the mainstream systems of education and training and does not typically lead to formalised certificates. Non-formal learning may be provided in the workplace and through the activities of civil society organisations and groups (such as in youth organisations, trades unions and political parties). It can also be provided through organisations or services that have been set up to complement formal systems (such as arts, music and sports classes or private tutoring to prepare for examinations).

**Informal learning** is a natural accompaniment to everyday life. Unlike formal and non-formal learning, informal learning is not necessarily intentional learning, and so may well not be recognised even by individuals themselves as contributing to their knowledge and skills.

**NB.** These terms are not necessarily used or defined in the same way, by others in other contexts, and even the 'official' definitions cited here would be contested by some. These terms and their definitions are provided here to define (as far as possible) their meaning and use in this report.

### Key terms used within the NOCN National Credit Framework

**Assessment criteria:** statements that enable judgements to be made about the achievement of a learning outcome or outcomes.

**C.A.T.S:** Credit Accumulation and Transfer System.

**Credit:** credit is awarded to learners on the successful completion of a unit or units once appropriate assessment procedures have been followed. A credit is awarded for the achievement of those outcomes that a learner, on average, might reasonably be expected to achieve in a notional 30 hours of learning.

**Credit accumulation:** the process of accumulating credits towards an identified target.

**Credit-based qualification:** a structure within which particular sets of credit achievement can be represented.

**Credit framework:** a set of specifications, incorporating unit, credit value and level, for describing, valuing, recognising and comparing achievements.

**Credit value:** the number of credits a learner may achieve through the successful completion of a unit. It is arrived at by taking the notional learning time required to achieve the specified outcomes and dividing it by 30.

**Delivery:** the process that describes how the learning provider enables the learner to achieve.

**Learning outcome:** a statement which identifies what a learner is expected to know, understand or do as a result of successfully completing a process of learning.

**Level:** the degree of complexity, learner autonomy and required range of achievement derived from agreed level descriptors.

**Level descriptors:** a method of identifying a unit within a progressive hierarchy of achievement.

**Module:** a subset of a learning programme in which a set of units is organised into a practical way to deliver learning.

**Programme:** the organisation of learning opportunities within which learners are offered the opportunity to achieve credit.

**Unit:** a coherent set of learning outcomes and assessment criteria to which credit value and level are ascribed.

## **Appendices**

**Appendix 1 – Questions and responses to LEAFEA questionnaire**

**Appendix 2 – Follow up interviews - responses**

**Appendix 3 – Follow up telephone/email interviews**

**Appendix 4 – NOCN quality development process**

## **APPENDIX 1 – questions and responses to LEA FEA questionnaire**

### **Q1 Is your LEA a member/user of the local Open College Network (OCN)?**

77% of the LEAs that responded were members of their local OCN and 23% were not.

#### **Key Finding**

The majority of LEAs that responded were members of their local OCN. This finding is important, as there could be an assumption that much of ACL provision is non-accredited and therefore LEAs would have no need to join an OCN.

### **Q2 Which OCN are you a member of?**

When an LEA replied 'no' to the question above they were directed to omit all other questions and proceed to question 11.

#### **Key Finding**

20% of LEAs that responded and were in membership of OCNs were members of London Open College Network. For this reason more than one LEA in membership of LOCN were interviewed in the follow up research.

### **Q3 Which of your LEA provision is accredited by the OCN?**

LEAs in OCN membership detailed provision that could lead to OCN accreditation. Several curriculum areas were prominent:

- 31% offered OCN accreditation in ICT

- 31% offered OCN accreditation in Arts and Crafts

- 31% offered OCN accreditation in Basic Skills

- 28.5% offered OCN accreditation in Family Learning

- 22% offered OCN accreditation in Languages

#### **Key Finding**

LEAs reported offering OCN accreditation in over 40 curriculum areas; however, it emerged from the survey that ICT, Arts and Crafts, Basic Skills, Family Learning and Languages were the most popular curriculum areas for OCN accreditation.

### **Q4 Which of your LEAs provision is NOT accredited by OCN?**

LEAs in OCN membership detailed the provision that they offered without OCN accreditation. Several curriculum areas were prominent in the provision without OCN accreditation:

24% did not offer OCN accreditation in ICT

22% did not offer OCN accreditation in Sports and Leisure  
14% did not offer OCN accreditation in Basic Skills  
12% did not offer OCN accreditation in Arts and Crafts.

Due to the wording of question 4 it was not possible to establish whether or not the provision which did not offer OCN accreditation was accredited by another awarding body or whether it was non-accredited. Some light was thrown on this by Q5, which explored reasons why OCN accreditation was not offered.

### **Key Finding**

ICT, Sports and Leisure, Basic Skills and Arts and Crafts were the most popular curriculum areas being offered without OCN accreditation.

### **Q5 Can you briefly state why not?**

This question linked to Q4 above.

37% stated that they used other awarding bodies  
10% stated that there was a demand for traditional non-accredited provision without the pressure for records of learning  
8% stated that students do not want accreditation  
8% stated that the processes were too bureaucratic  
6% saw cost as a barrier  
6% saw no need to offer OCN accreditation  
6% felt that other qualifications were more widely accepted

Although some LEAs felt that their students did not want accreditation, all LEAs in OCN membership offered some OCN accredited provision and 43% of them used other awarding bodies for recognition of achievement, or clearly preferred other awarding body products.

Some LEAs were concerned about the cost of OCN accreditation and that the processes were too bureaucratic.

### **Key Finding**

The majority of LEAs surveyed in OCN membership offered their learners accreditation either through OCN or another awarding body.

### **Q6 Does your LEA 'contract out' provision targeted at adult learners which may be accredited by the local Open College Network?**

The survey found that the current provision in LEAs was organised in several ways. More than half (59%) of those surveyed delivered their provision in house. This meant that they had responsibility for developing internal quality assurance and development systems, which would meet the requirements of the CIF and ensure eligibility for future funding

from the LSC. Several of the LEAs interviewed for the research had concerns regarding the adequacy of their systems.

41% of the LEAs in OCN membership surveyed, contracted out their adult and community learning provision to another provider/s. The question did not ask whether or not they contracted out all or a proportion of the provision.

45% of respondents who contracted out stated that they contracted out to an FE provider. In the research interviews the LEAs described the Service Level Agreements that were in place in connection to these contracting out relationships.

25% who contracted out stated that they contracted out their provision to the WEA.

A further 25% of those who stated that they contracted out used a combination of the WEA and FE.

5% of those LEAs which contracted out did so with a local training provider.

### **Key Finding**

41% of LEAs contracted out their provision to FE, the WEA or a combination of both.

### **Q7 Could you estimate the number of learners registered on OCN accredited programmes through your LEA during 2000-2001?**

79% of the OCN member LEAs responded to this question. Responses ranged from 0 to 10,000. The total number of learners on OCN programmes was 37,552.

### **Key finding**

The total number of learners enrolled on OCN accredited programmes in 2000-2001 was 37,552.

### **Q8 Have you used your local OCN for any of the following reasons? (Please tick one or more of the following)**

- **Quality Assurance**
- **Certification**
- **Funding**
- **Staff Development**
- **Other**
- **Quality Development**
- **Network support**
- **LSC**
- **ESF**

88% of the LEAs who were members of an OCN responded to the above question.

The results are listed below in rank order and are expressed in terms of the percentage number of LEAs who responded positively to each service listed.

- 88% used the local OCN for certification
- 58% used the OCN for quality development
- 44% used the OCN for staff development
- 41% used the OCN for quality assurance
- 39.5% used the OCN for LSC
- 28% used the OCN for funding
- 25% used the OCN for network support
- 9% used the OCN for ESF
- 2% used the OCN for other

### **Key Finding**

The majority of responses suggest these LEAs use OCNs for quality assurance and development purposes.

### **Q9 Are there any programmes or projects that have particularly benefited from OCN accreditation?**

When asked whether there were any programmes that had particularly benefited from OCN support, 87% responded positively. Special mention was given to the following areas of provision: Life Skills, Basic Skills, Family Literacy, Languages, First rung provision.

**Key Finding – 87% of LEAs felt that programmes had benefited from OCN support.**

### **Q10 Please add any other comments you may wish to make here.**

33% of OCN member LEAs chose to make further comments.

Positive comments were as follows:

- Three LEAs Chose OCN for its flexibility and its student-friendly approach, which allowed them to respond to learners' needs.
- One LEA used their OCN to facilitate collaboration with other council departments, for example Childcare Protection in Social Services.
- Another stated 'OCN accreditation has assisted the service in the development of quality assurance mechanisms for all our work'.
- One LEA stated that some of their staff were OCN moderators.
- Another LEA belonged to a 'very supportive OCN' and had 'benefited from their guidance'.

Negative comments were as follows:

- Three LEAs fear that OCN moderation systems are already too cumbersome.
- Three found the OCN paperwork 'cumbersome' and asked for procedures and paperwork to be standardised.

- One LEA suggested that ‘The imposition of an OCN Framework across all non-accredited learning would mean the loss of some flexibility and limit the ability to meet learner needs.’

**Key Finding – Individual experiences of OCN membership can vary quite widely among providers. However, these responses suggested that the bureaucratic burden of OCN accreditation may be off-putting for some providers, whether or not accreditation itself is judged to be in the learners’ interests.**

**Q11 If you have not used your local OCN it would be helpful if you could please indicate why not.**

The following are responses from the 15 LEAs that responded and were currently not members on their local OCN. Percentages refer to respondents to this question only:

- 33% stated that all provision in the LEA is non-accredited
- 27% stated that they were applying to join an OCN
- 27% stated that their contractors choose accreditation routes

The following comments came from individual LEAs:

- ‘We understand the [OCN] processes are complex and long drawn out’
- ‘Projects have not lent themselves to follow external accreditation’
- ‘New in post – not used previously in LEA’
- ‘Not fully aware of its use –most programmes are non-accredited’
- ‘OCN has not been introduced into the area it is under consideration’
- ‘[Our] LEA provides a non-schedule 2 service only’

**Key Finding – One third of non-member LEAs do not offer any accredited ACL provision. Almost a third of LEAs are considering joining their local OCN.**



## Appendix 2 - Follow up interviews - responses

Quotes are taken from the follow up interviews. Numbers refer to the case study reference.

### Quality Assurance and Development

*An example of Quality and curriculum development involving OCN, "Making Learning Count" was cited which described a curriculum development exercise funded by the Heart of England TEC. This resulted in a set of tutor designed, overarching OCN units in ICT, languages, return to learn and return to work. Five years on these units have been extensively used and reaccredited. (25)*

*Submitting a programme for approval or using units off the shelf, which have been developed elsewhere would ensure some standardisation nationally. It would take away the responsibility for devising a curriculum from the large numbers of part time tutors who have little access to staff development. Support with curriculum development is seen as a major benefit of NOCN systems. This comes up often in staff meetings. (23)*

*The authority has benefited from OCN support in the past when working on its Family Learning programme. The benefits include both the resulting accreditation and the resulting networks with other providers in neighbouring LEAs. (30)*

*As a result of involvement with OCN, tutors have networked more with other organisations and have picked up some useful self - assessment/evaluation techniques, as well as curriculum development. The local learning partnership which includes the LEA, FE, CVS and WEA all deliver to a learning outcomes model and are sharing good practice. (30)*

*I led with LOCN a credit framework bid for the voluntary sector, to get the voluntary sector organisations quality assured through LOCN so that they can deliver units of assessment for a full course or units of it as a way of bringing the voluntary sector into the direct training delivery framework. The LSC have awarded us money over 2 years across 6 London boroughs to begin that process. I've been astonished at the number of voluntary sector organisations that want to get involved. They want to provide some employability skills for their learners, and who see it as important for their learners' progression. They get their talent validated. They get something for their achievement. (1)*

*The main programmes we deliver that use OCN credit are IT at levels 1 and 2. I think that if we need to be getting at levels, what levels of achievement are these learning outcomes being set at. There's a question about some sort of standardised agreement of what different levels mean. So it might be that with Open College you've got a national bank of statements that might come through at different levels and you could customise your course and be reasonably satisfied that you've got a level 2 course in front of you. The system could be equally applied to non-accredited provision.*

*I think in terms of curriculum development we have developed our courses and used their outline. We have quality circle meetings and standardisation meetings, which fit the quality assurance process of NOCN. (19)*

*We develop our own programmes where we can offer local certificates for very small amounts of learning. The most popular courses we offer are IT, the tutor can develop programmes which move learners on, if that is what they want. We have good retention rates in these IT courses and an achievement rate of 99%. (55)*

## **Moderation**

*The whole review and moderation process would be welcomed. It was felt that the whole issue of moderation and assessment would benefit from the introduction of NOCN systems. (23)*

*At the moment we use an internal moderation system, a round robin system that's peer assessment. Within our 'computers on wheels' programme that works very well. Then there's external moderation. I don't see why you couldn't have a similar kind of system. I think if you're doing the internal moderation, peer assessment type systems there's got to be some sort of external verification of that, but what format that might take, I don't know. We have introduced a graded observation of teaching and learning pro-forma and I have termly monitoring meetings with all the colleges. (19)*

*Moderation-realistically when we work at over 400 venues in the city, we have enough trouble with trying to get all the evidence together in one spot for the external moderator to come, then the timing is not always right, sometimes the learners would have gone. We find that sometimes the external moderation process inhibits learners who are not static. What we would have to do would be to triple our admin to cope with the paperwork. This is because we have a lot of courses with low numbers of learners and such dispersed provision.*

*We haven't had time to go down the accreditation route. We have regular meetings that look at Quality, but we are poor at minuting them. We have introduced some observation of Teaching and Learning. Some of our best tutors are facilitators rather than qualified teachers so we would have a lot of issues around staff development if more formal systems were introduced. (55)*

## **Progression**

*NOCN Quality Assurance systems can contribute to clearer progression routes in the following ways*

- a) the learner has a clear idea of exactly what they have learnt due to recording the learning outcomes on an individual learning plan.*

*b) Other providers would have a better-developed idea of the level and scope of the learning that has taken place.*

*The whole issue of collecting management information data is perceived as a serious issue by this authority. This is in part due to its size and area management structure. There is no data collected on the destinations of learners, which would help to inform future strategy as well as evaluating the impact of current provision. (25)*

*There has been difficulty in identifying suitable progression opportunities for some learners. Learners tend to stay in house and move on to an accredited programme. There is an in house advice and guidance service. The authority is not always clear about the destinations of learners. The collection of data is not a requirement at present. (23)*

*Good Quality Assurance systems such as NOCN will assist the gatekeepers of other provision to assess relevant starting points for learners as they progress. The achievement of agreed outcomes standardises the experience of learners and allows progression in a wider geographical area if needed. (30)*

*In some cases progression from our non-accredited courses is limited. People do return to courses they have done previously because they enjoy doing it, for example yoga. (11)*

*Progression now with OCN depends upon achievement of credits. In my experience even that doesn't work, certainly in London it's not the case that students who have LOCN credit get seamless progression. Colleges have their own barriers and their own ways of gate-keeping entry points to courses. So the real issue is I think, not that. I think progression routes are very much about partnership working, about transparency, about protocols that you share and about breaking down the insulation of organisations. Having said that, the performance indicators around colleges are so tight now, you can't blame them for being pernicky about giving access to students with partial achievement and credits.*

*My own feeling however is that for learners it makes an enormous difference and I have certainly experienced learners who have just got so much out of achieving a few credits and being able to show their certificates and move on. So were it does work it's magic. I've seen learners' progress from no qualifications to HE in two years, and that's really what it's about. (1)*

*It's a question of what meaning the outcomes would have in an FE context, or even in an HE context. So it would take those organisations to value the worth of those, and I'm not sure that they do. (19)*

## **Professional development**

*Professional development is also an area of concern in this authority. There is some observation of Teaching and Learning as well as some tutors undertaking City and Guild 730/7. (23)*

*There are huge issues with implementing the FENTO standards, and with the FENTO standards will come the staff development around quality assurance. However it is going to take some time for those to bed in (30)*

*Unfortunately there is no funding usually available for staff development. (11)*

*Professional development- certainly NOCN have very good staff development programmes, things like mapping basic skills to other types of provision. (1)*

*We have a lot of staff who are facilitators. They are from the community and are very good role models. We do some in-house staff development. (55)*

### **The contribution of Learners to Quality Development of the Learning Programme**

*At the end of the programme the tutor is responsible for producing a course evaluation, which must take account of feedback from learners. (25)*

*The tutor must undertake an evaluation including feedback from learners at the end of the programme. (23)*

*Sometimes learners receive feedback via a one to one session with the tutor at other times this can be given to a whole group. There is no requirement for written feedback with either accredited or non-accredited courses (30)*

*In order to improve we need to get feedback from learners. (11)*

*Observation of teaching and learning and talking to learners themselves about their experience of their learning and satisfaction is the right approach. Feedback from learners is another important aspect of quality assurance. But often the measures are qualitative and learners may not be willing to share on the grounds of confidentiality. Things like self-esteem and confidence are qualitative indicators of success, which actually made a difference to someone's sense of themselves. How you record that and whether you should record that is another matter. You will never get norms for qualitative indicators unless you standardise what you capture in some way and whether those are meaningful... (1)*

*Whether learners are involved in the process depends on how long the course is. If it's one session, we're not going to jump through all those hoops, we're just going to do the minimum health and safety checks, and then some kind of assessment. If it's a longer course then we might get into looking at Learning Styles. I think its finding systems whereby you can see what stages of that system are appropriate for that particular curriculum area, or that group. So you might have 'IT for the terrified', for elderly frail people who are blind, and 'IT for the terrified' for quite young people who are used to IT, so it all depends on the group as well. I think its essential that it remains a learner focused process, then it will work, e.g. when I started in adult education it was just when colleges became incorporated and I'd come from a Basic Skills background where things*

*were pretty well processed then. I remember going to visit classes where there wasn't so much as a piece of paper and you said to the learners, "well how long is the course" – don't know. They didn't know anything about the course, they didn't know what they were expected to do. I think people have a right to know what they're there to do. Plus what you do when you introduce any kind of system, no matter how informal is to reinforce to the learner that they are there about learning. (19)*

*Every learner completes a course evaluation form at the end of the course. This form asks learners to comment upon the content of the course, the resources used and their level of understanding of the tutor. It also asks if they have any other courses that they would be interested in. We feel this helps us to monitor what we are offering and to introduce new courses when people want them. (55)*

### **Programme/Contract review**

*All tutors are required to provide the area manager with a scheme of work or programme plan. This outlines the content and sequence of delivery. It should include reference to the teaching and learning styles to be adopted, as well as outlining any assessment and evaluation that will take place. Tutors should also break this down into session plans. (25)*

*Tutors must produce a course outline. There must be some form of initial assessment. There are no requirements for written records of this to be kept in the case of non-accredited provision. The tutor should produce lesson plans, which are kept in a course file. (23)*

*Tutors who deliver accredited courses are required to produce lesson plans and must conduct learner evaluation of the programme. (30)*

*The scheme I'm beginning to think about is this. We have in the past had an annual inspection from our inspection team, of all the contracts. It has always been a selective inspection and we always vary and change it every year to look at different bits of the curriculum. Now given that all our providers are all setting up systems for the observation of teaching and learning, and have their own goals we are looking to develop a system whereby we might verify that. What you need to do is to quality assure the curriculum delivery, the experience of teaching and learning in the classroom, resources, the environment. What you don't want to do is to interfere with the learning experience of learners.*

*Qualitative indicators of some kind are a requirement of our contract. It's a developing area of learner satisfaction surveys. I think there is an absolute obsession with capturing performance indicators in informal learning, which beggars belief. We have far too much intervention in any case in accredited learning at the moment, let alone, unaccredited. Doing a European comparison because of a European project I am involved in on adult learning, everywhere we've gone, Holland Spain, have been absolutely shocked by the amount of Performance Indicators and measuring that we are going through. (1)*

*We have developed a Quality Calendar in the form of a checklist. The SAR forms the basis of our Action Plan which is subject to annual review. We need better data analysis, so we are introducing a performance development scheme. (11)*

*Review- What we would be hoping to do would be, lets say it was a 30 week course, there would be ongoing review, and you'd review at least 3 times within that, but then at the end as well as completing some sort of evaluation questionnaire you would actually then sign off the learning outcomes with the tutor. I think there's been debate with the LSC about the verification of this, in that the tutor and the learner would have to sign off, so that there was proof that it had happened. (19)*

*Our systems are not formalised. Tutors look at evaluation forms every 3 to 4 weeks, these form the basis of our meetings. (55)*

## **Recognition of Achievement**

### **Measuring achievement**

*Learning outcomes are negotiated with the learners. Assessment of whether these outcomes have been met by the learners should involve the tutor, peers and the learner. The final assessment involves a combination of all three. The methods by which this is achieved could very well be different in all of our 12 centres. (25)*

*Whether or not there is accreditation the learner will be given a written course outline which states what the course will cover, previous knowledge or skills that are required, how the learner will be taught, whether there will be any requirement to study at home, and what knowledge and skills can be gained from the course. The course outline answers the question 'How will I know how I am progressing? With the statement 'You will know how you are progressing by your achievements.' The course outline is discussed with the learners and individual learning records are kept for accredited provision. (23)*

*The authority is in the process of bringing the procedures for non-accredited courses into line with the accredited provision. This will mean teaching to learning outcomes that will be developed by the tutor but are broad enough to be adjusted by joint discussion between the tutor and the learners. At present the outcomes relate to groups of learners rather than individual learning plans. (30)*

*The best approach is for every course to have clear learning outcomes mapped out and individual learners in their learning plan to identify their learning goals. The goals they wish to achieve, which may or may not be a match with the full set of objectives or outcomes planned in the course. For example partial achievement may be exactly what a particular learner wants, i.e. an element e.g. on a language course a learner may want a minimal level of communication for when they travel abroad, rather than write fluently .... and they may state that.*

*However, we contact out to partners who have a different approach unfortunately, to Quality Assurance. At present we are working with them to improve and get some kind of standardisation. (1)*

*I think there is a place for curriculum description using units of assessment with learning outcomes and assessment criteria, but where with learners who are not interested in any form of accreditation, through the individual learning plan you might be able to identify against the mapped curriculum, descriptors for learning outcomes for that course, to say what that learner has achieved. For example, if there are six identified learning outcomes for units of assessment, it might be that a learner has achieved two of these, and you could say which ones they were, and you could add some kind of qualifier as to how they had achieved them, i.e. fully, begun to achieve etc.*

*Overall- the emphasis for non-accredited provision is about establishing learning outcomes. We tend to do that on a group basis, but then leave room for individual learning goals and also to ask them at the end for an evaluation and to include other incidental learning, or the benefits they've had. (19)*

*What we have been developing is a Quality Assurance Tool Kit. It is a checklist, which all our providers now have in their contract/service level agreement, and are expected to deliver to. For example it spells out the expectation of what a learner would have in the way of an individual learning plan, and how that would be updated and how the evidence for that would be kept. It then has a tutor checklist for what they should have in place for every class, and how they update that and where they would keep the evidence for it. Managers of programmes complete a sheet about the expectations of staff development and induction in the Quality Assurance procedures. It is called a toolkit because it gives the checklist for the basic things we expect to be in place. What we are not saying is your Individual Learning Plan has to look like this, or this is the paperwork we expect you to use. We're saying, use your own systems/pro-forma – but make sure you cover the menu, because these are our standards, and this is what we expect of you. A discussion we have been having is about making the individual learning plan the audit point for quality on all non-accredited provision.*

*Over the last two years we have experimented with ways of recording evidence of students' progress and achievement on non-accredited courses. The term non-accredited is the term we are using for all courses, which do not lead to a qualification. The concepts being used are that there should be evidence of learning gain and distance travelled by the learners. (11)*

## **Initial assessment**

*That wouldn't necessarily take a written format- we've looked at other models. Obviously if you're doing an IT course and it's accredited through OCN then you're going to look at 'what skills have these people got', but if you're doing something like basic skills then you're going to have a more formal initial assessment. If it's something like going into a women's hostel and working with the women there it's more of a group exercise about finding out where these people are at and where they want to be. So that's how we would*

*see initial assessment coming in. But there's also things like the initial assessment in physical exercise like yoga, where you're trying to find out about a person's health and abilities, especially when they are older and so on. (19)*

*Best practice is achieved when working with trained tutors. All tutors are encouraged to use the training aids developed by NIACE for example all tutors should have access to 'Assessment Matters.' Tutors are encouraged to develop their classroom practice by engaging in initial assessment, but this does not always take the form of a paper-based activity. It may be a discussion concerning the scope and content of the course. (25)*

*The group are often at different levels because we operate an open access policy. An initial assessment form is completed as part of the enrolment/induction process at the first meeting with the learners (11)*

*There is no requirement at the moment for tutors to undertake any form of initial assessment with learners. However most tutors do undertake some initial assessment but this is not formalised and it is not necessarily recorded. (30)*

*You then go into some kind of a learning plan. Again we're trying to gear those to the needs of the learners. Obviously if we're working with old people in an old people's home, with frail people, it might be that the tutor will keep a record of progress.*

*We're hoping that there will be some kind of review built into the whole process and that the stages of the individual learning plan will identify learning outcomes. What we're seeing as a way of identifying achievement in non-accredited learning is in the achievement of those learning outcomes.*

*Initial assessment - usually mainly provided by learner, but some question & answers with teacher to help learner gain confidence in basic self-assessment.*

*Within the project: The Individual Learning Plans offers the opportunity to discuss what the learner has already done in previous courses, and what s/he wants to do now. Learning Outcomes offers a menu of options, which indicates what will be learned on the course, and learners can self assess to indicate what they can already do. There are opportunities to review the progress at intervals, and review goals. At the end of the course learner and tutor will record what has been gained.*

*Outside of the project: Most tutors will carry out an initial informal assessment with the learners, and record an agreement. But the process varies greatly from tutor to tutor, and within different subject areas.*

*To enable learning outcomes to be measured providers must do an initial assessment. This is something that we look at when we undertake our monitoring visits. Learners complete an evaluation form. The form was devised to link into the CIF.*

*Our tutors do verbal initial assessments with all learners, they check where they are up to and if it seems more appropriate they will refer them onto a college course. The tutor has both time and pay to undertake this assessment. (55)*



## Recording of group achievement

*We're looking also at group methods of capturing achievement. The WEA is actually very strong on this because that of course was the way they did it, they established the agreed learning outcomes of a class in advance, formally wrote that up, and then at the end of that programme learners would come back to that and express to what extent the group had achieved those learning outcomes, and review what their experience had been. (1)*

*Group methods – this depends entirely on the curriculum and what you are delivering, and whether it is appropriate or not e.g. if you are delivering IT to a mixed range of ability/skills it would not be appropriate, but in some cases it may be a better way of recording achievement. (1)*

*Tutors complete one form for the group. These records are collated from individual learner records. (11)*

*Group achievement – one way is to look at things like adult learners week awards, and also case study. We have had a couple of groups, one is an active retirement group, the other is a big issue group (a cookery group). They actually achieved so much that to say "there were 12 starters, 8 finished and of those 5 got accreditation, it just didn't say how far the 12 of them had gone. So taking a case study approach seems to me a way of showing the added value of non-accredited learning. Then there could be performance, so if you have a dance group performing at the town hall who are photographed, then that can be used for evidence of achievement. We had a group that made a stained glass window, and pictures of that are in the assessment report. (19)*

<h3>The potential for use of NOCN QA/QD Systems with provision that is currently non-accredited</h3>
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In addition to the questions looking at specific issues concerning the ways in which they currently used their OCN all the case study LEAs were asked to comment specifically on the potential for applying the NOCN systems for Quality Assurance and Development to non-accredited provision.

The responses to this question are given below.

*When provision is in-house it can be very difficult to find anyone suitable to act as an internal moderator. Both internal and external moderation contribute greatly to sharing good practice in all aspects of curriculum and delivery. By using the NOCN systems of moderation quality can be ensured and reviewed. The production of usable reports by the OCN is also considered to be a strength. (25)*

*For providers – consistency of approach and practices by all the area centres. There are some tutors in the authority teaching on non-accredited courses who use the same paperwork already, whether the group are going for accreditation or not. The argument sometimes given that the NOCN systems are too cumbersome does not apply here, as internal quality systems demand much of the same evidence.*

*OCN units are not as constraining as a syllabus, with courses that are below 30 hours it will still be an advantage to put NOCN Quality assurance systems in place.*

*For learners – equality of access to high quality provision. There is a need to acknowledge that all learners should be entitled to have any learning acknowledged and valued by offering accreditation.*

*To the provider – it is easier to show what has been learnt if a learning outcomes approach is used.*

*To the learner – most would like it as it provides a much more detailed description of what they have learnt.*

*In both instances the concern is that the tutor can incorporate the necessary paperwork into class time in an unobtrusive way, which is not off putting to learners. It was accepted that forms of evidence other than paper based could be developed which would satisfy NOCN and learner requirements. (23)*

*I think LEAs would be foolish not to develop good QA systems and these could be guided by NOCN processes, but I wouldn't like to see something imposed on us, even something as user friendly as the Open College system. I think some NOCN Quality systems combined with our own quality systems would be ideal.*

*The difficult areas of NOCN systems are e.g. with SHARE, it's the paperwork aspect of it. Then the collection of the portfolios, the external moderation process, the sending them back, waiting for the certificates, sending certificates out, by this time half the people have left, its onerous in terms of administration. I think it would be helpful to have something there to say here's a framework that you can operate within. We have had to develop systems that take account of the Common Inspection Framework and the Adult Learning Inspectorate guidelines and make sure that we 're meeting those criteria and those would probably sit with NOCN systems too. (19)*

*The NOCN system would transfer with some amendments, but account needs to be taken of systems already being used by staff, as these may be appropriate.*

*Work has been done, on mapping QA systems but the bottom line is we must work with ALI and our LSCs to ensure the CIF is fit for purpose.*

*This authority believes that most providers are struggling to come up with internal systems that can be applied to non-accredited courses and would benefit from input and support from NOCN. The authority has benefited from OCN support in the past when working on its Family Learning programme. The benefits include both the resulting accreditation and the resulting networks with other providers in neighbouring LEAs. (30)*

*I think the OCN Quality Assurance Systems are a useful framework, but they have in the past been very bureaucratic.*

## Appendix 3 – follow up telephone/e-mail interviews –responses

Following the face-to-face interviews, a further 12 telephone and/or e-mail interviews were conducted, with a random sample of the remaining respondents. The set of questions used were the same as those used in the face-to-face interviews. Responses were given code letters and the most detailed of the responses are included below. These interviews were designed to find out if the views expressed in face-to-face interviews would be corroborated using a random additional sample.. Again a semi-structured format was used.

Not every LEA surveyed responded to all questions. The responses were grouped using the headings, measuring of achievement, provision for staff development, arrangements for moderation, and involvement of learners in the processes associated with recognition of achievement. Summaries of the responses are detailed below.

### Measurement of achievement

*"During 2001/2 we piloted a series of programmes with learning outcomes. These were turned into 'menus' from which learners could identify which sections that were important to them, sections have been included for recording evidence and feedback."* (D)

*"The recording on personal records, of achievement of agreed intended learning outcomes is being introduced across the curriculum"* (G)

*"Each learner is set learning goals to achieve a learning outcome. Providers then give us an end of course report on a form that tells us which learners achieved their learning outcomes"* (I)

*"We have offered OCN programmes in the past, and find that many learners do not want accreditation. The format of Learning Outcome and assessment criteria is a model we use, but the main concern that I have is the inflexibility of OCN courses. It is difficult for tutors and learners to negotiate the content of their courses, and amend sections if they did not want them. With OCN programmes the learner has to achieve all criteria in order to gain accreditation."* (F)

### Provision for staff development

*"We have a programme of staff training 3 times a year for our tutors."* (A)

*"Staff training sessions held in all areas to introduce new systems"* (H)

*"It is the responsibility of the provider to train their staff. However we have run courses in conjunction with NIACE/LSDA and have provided their staff with information about ALI and quality through a staff newsletter. We have trained 20 staff made up of the ACLS management team and provider staff."* (J)

*"We are a very large service, and offer a large number of non-accredited courses, taught mainly by very part time tutors. Because of this we have identified key subject areas where we could standardize provision across the service, and have focused on developing programmes within those areas. We are anxious to standardize, so that progression routes make more sense, but at the same time we want to make sure our provision is flexible, and offers tutors and learners the opportunity to negotiate within them. We have supported tutors on the pilots and evaluated their responses. We have not yet moderated the outcomes. We would need to devise a system, which all tutors, no matter what subject they teach, could follow. There are many courses, which are one-offs." (E)*

### **Arrangements for moderation**

*"As I have worked mainly in community settings I have no experience of moderation" (B)*

*"We have not yet moderated the outcomes of our pilot programmes" (E)*

*"Internal moderation to be addressed when systems are embedded" (H)*

*"The ACLS management team will be undertaking a series of OTL throughout the year which will mean we will be able to establish moderated grades across all our providers" (J)*

### **Involvement of learners in the processes associated with recognition of achievement**

*"The learners are involved throughout the process and specifically in negotiating the learning plans, initial assessment, reviewing the learning and in the mid and end of course evaluations." (A)*

*"Learners are involved in their setting of goals, and progress" (E)*

Several respondents merely answered 'yes' i.e. that learners were involved in the processes, but without giving any details of how they were involved.

All of the respondents stated that

"Learners complete an evaluation form"

**Key finding – These interviews did not generate any new themes and the responses followed very similar patterns to those found in the face-to-face interviews, reported above.**

## Group interviews with Learners

Group interviews were conducted with three groups of learners. This was intended to reveal consensus views, generate richer responses and to determine whether the views gained through the questionnaire and interviews with heads of service were shared by learners.

Learners were interviewed at their place of learning, three ACL evening classes. The learners all formed part of the provision contracted out to a local FE college in Staffordshire. The FE college is a member of West Midland OCN. Some community outreach centres which form part of the provision offer accreditation, this particular centre did not. The total number of learners who participated in the group interviews was 42.

The learners were taking part in three very different programmes of study. None of their programmes offered accreditation. The programmes of learning were, Aromatherapy, Egyptology and Art. A transcript of the questions posed to learners and their responses can be found below

Questions asked are numbered and in bold. Statements following each question represent a summary of learners' responses

### **1. Did you have any help choosing the course and how did you assess the skills needed to start it?**

Most learners had chosen their course because they had seen it in the college prospectus or had seen a list of courses and venues in the local newspaper. None of the learners thought that there would be any special requirements prior to enrolling on the course. Most of the learners had made a self-assessment of their ability to take on the course. The aims that were expressed for participating in the courses included having an interest in the subject and wishing to have some guidance in developing it. Other motives included working alongside other people who had a similar interest.

### **2. Has anyone spoken to you about what you can expect the course to be like?**

The courses were listed in the college prospectus alongside a range of other courses. The majority of learners met their tutor at the first session, although one or two had been able to speak to the tutors in advance. The tutors usually gave the learners a verbal outline of the content of the course at the first session. Tutors discussed the outcomes of the course (learning outcomes) and there was some negotiation of the programme. The learners were satisfied that the courses were as they expected.

**3. How do you think you will know whether you are making any progress?**

The main ways that the learners felt that they would be able to assess their progress was by getting feedback on their performance. In the practical subjects relying on skill development this was achieved by demonstrations by the tutor followed by practice sessions by the learners, at which feedback on skill development was given by the tutor. In the more theoretical subject based on acquisition of knowledge, the learners monitored their understanding by asking questions.

**4. Have you or anyone else written anything down about either of the previous two things?**

Learners were often given a list of topics to be covered on the course at the first session. None of the learners were aware of any written records relating to their progress.

**5. How important is it to you that you get a chance to know how you as an individual are getting on?**

The learners stated that it was important to know how they individually were getting on, and it would be good to get some form of certificate at the end of the course. The vast majority of learners were not aware of OCN credit, but when this was explained they felt that this would have been a solution to both of the issues raised. One or two reservations were expressed about accreditation, these concerned fears about an imposed syllabus that might be more restrictive than their current course. The learners also stated that they wished to follow a programme without exams.

<b>What do learners want?</b>
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There appears to be a concern on the part of some providers surveyed through LEAFEA and within the literature reviewed that learners do not want accreditation and would find accreditation off putting. This does not match the findings of the research either through the follow up face-to-face interviews, the telephone /e-mail interviews or the group interviews, which offered the following perspectives.

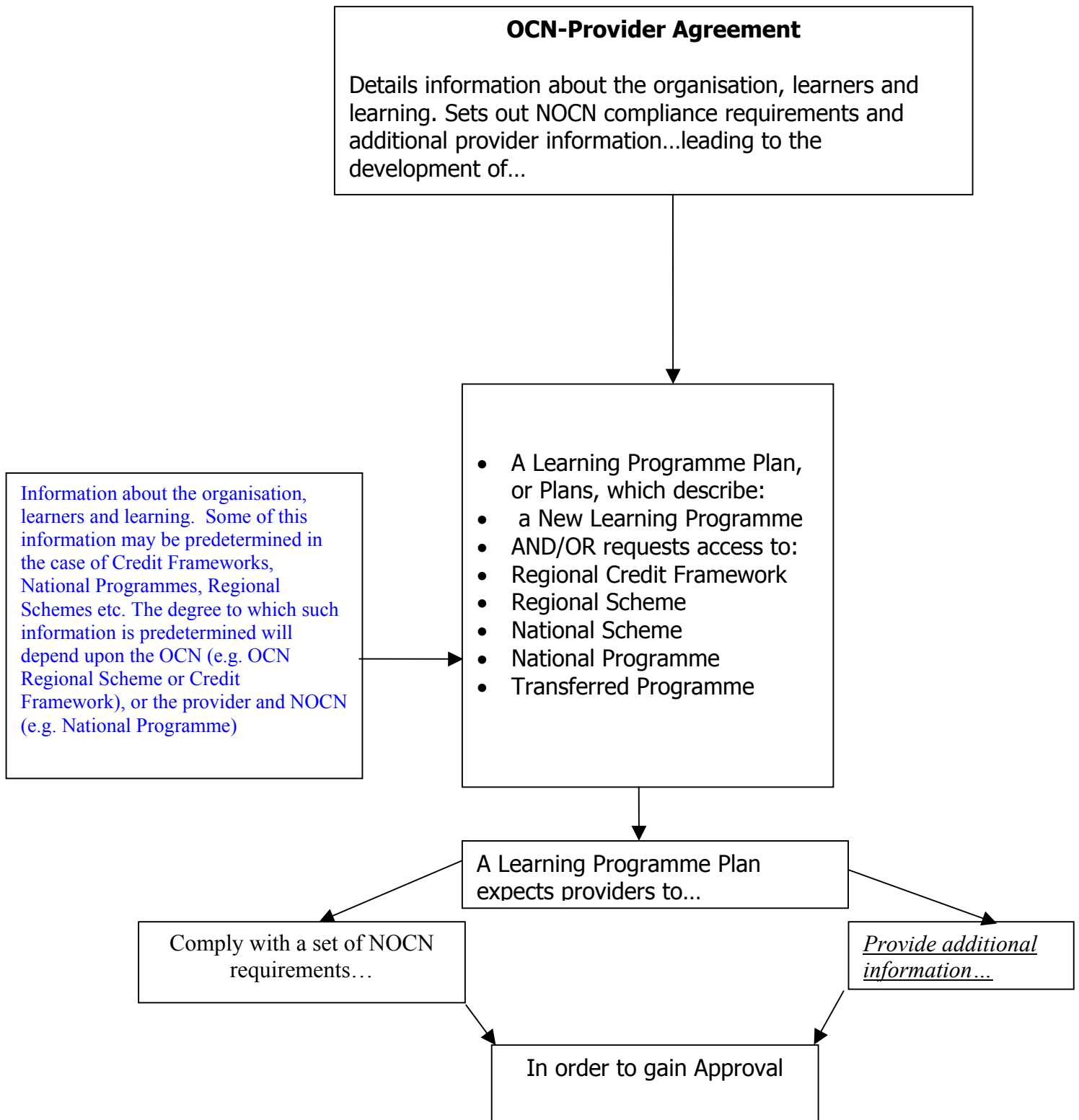
*"For learners there should be equality of access to high quality provision. There is a need to acknowledge that all learners should be entitled to have any learning acknowledged and valued by offering accreditation."*

*"It is easier to show what has been learnt if a learning outcomes approach is used. Most learners would like it as it provides a much more detailed description of what they have learnt."*

*"I think any learning can be recognised, but whether you want it to be, or whether the*

*learner would want it to be is another matter. I think it is very much about what the learner wants, and what their objectives are and if they want to do learning for progression or not. The learner that starts off saying "I'm just doing this for fun" and then at the end of the course says " I thought we were doing it for fun but I've really got into it and want to go on" That's the kind of flexibility you want to keep in the system."*

## Appendix 4 – NOCN quality development process and the diversity of approaches to designing learning programmes through OCNs





# Learning from experience - implementing credit:

## A Comparative Analysis of Awarding Body Credit Practice within the Credit and Qualification Framework for Wales

Finbar Lillis

Carole Stott

Credit Works November 2005

## **Disclaimer**

This report from the Federation of Awarding Bodies (FAB) was commissioned by the Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales (CQFW), and partly funded through the European Social Fund Objectives 1 and 3. It represents an important summary of the ground breaking work carried out by the Federation of Awarding Bodies and its members. The content, analysis and recommendations are the work of the authors and do not necessarily represent views or policy of the CQFW.

## Foreword

This report was commissioned by the Federation of Awarding Bodies (FAB) as one of the key outcomes of a project sponsored by the Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales (CQFW) with the support of ESF funding.

The development of a national Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales is a major reform within the education system and supports other initiatives in Wales. This project is one of a number of strands of work to support this reform and it focuses on the involvement and participation of accredited awarding bodies in the emerging CQFW.

In the past awarding bodies have had limited experience of building credit into their qualifications, and the project has allowed a range of awarding bodies to 'learn by doing' and thus to develop their understanding of credit; what is described in this report as their "credit sense".

The report provides a detailed review of the awarding body activity as part of this development and is a welcome analysis of the process of making credit a reality in a range of qualifications offered to Welsh learners.

The project has also included a series of briefing sessions for awarding body members of FAB which has done much to improve their understanding of credit and inform their consideration of and engagement with the CQFW.

The report is not intended to compare or evaluate the performance of awarding bodies or to provide a critique of the CQFW. It aims to be a critical but positive analysis of awarding body credit practice. It has directed and informed the on-going development of guidance for all awarding bodies engaged in the CQFW and the suggested ways forward which will help FAB and its membership plan for CQFW implementation in the future.

The development of the CQFW and the project activity has taken place with the direct and active partnership of key stakeholders, including ACCAC, HEFCW, and ELWa. The stakeholders and awarding body partners in this project worked together on revising and reforming their qualifications, addressing technical and policy issues as they arose and finding solutions collectively. This collaborative approach to reform in the project has proved highly effective and beneficial and has positively affected not only the practice and the products of the participants but also the relationships between the major stakeholders, and the dynamic within the qualifications system overall.

This is demonstrated by the emergence of consistent themes through the analysis leading to this report which are best summarised as:

- The need for and commitment to mutual learning based on practice
- A resultant sense of genuine shared ownership of the CQFW and mutual interest in its success
- The building of mutual trust and confidence to underpin the system
- Recognition that no single stakeholder has the capacity to introduce this major reform and that collaboration is essential.

It is notable that the project participants, whilst being realistic about the detailed development work that still needs to be undertaken, have been overwhelmingly positive about the impact of this project. They have cited benefits for their individual organisations, including their products, internal relationships and communication, and their readiness and capacity both to implement and influence reform. They have also recognised and cited benefits to their customers as a result of improvements.

*It's been a useful experience and preparation for reform and change. People are positive and see the benefits for flexibility in our products and meeting business demands for smaller more flexible qualifications [where that exists]. We're still waiting to see what happens in the wider arena though. (ASET)*

*Positive. It's made us integrate teams better and it's improved our relationship with our partner in Wales. (CACHE)*

*The CQFW has helped Edexcel understand the principles of credit and enabled us to comment confidently on other emerging frameworks. (Edexcel)*

*...people in the organisation now know about credit – there is less concern about its introduction and less anxiety about managing it...The project has helped us prepare for the demands of reform. (City & Guilds)*

*The added value of credit lies in its currency – operatives who arrive with accredited skills will save a company money and time in training. (SEMTA)*

The report has provided FAB and its members with a detailed analysis of the practice of awarding bodies in the project that will help FAB to inform and support its members and others to develop their credit sense and capacity. The report will be used to inform guidance for awarding bodies that will be developed by the end of the year as part of the FAB project. The report has also captured some of the areas for development that were raised by the participants as a result of the project activity. FAB will be working with CQFW and other stakeholders to take these forward for consideration by the Credit Common Accord Forum.

### **Federation of Awarding Bodies and Credit Works**

## Contents

Foreword	Federation of Awarding Bodies and Credit Works	
Introduction to the Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales		
Section 1	Context, history and development of credit principles in Wales	
Section 2	Background to the Project	
Section 3	Summary of Key Findings	
Section 4	Assigning Credit	
Section 5	Some Challenging Issues: <b>4.1 Accreditation of Prior Learning in a credit system</b> <b>4.2 General Qualifications</b> <b>4.3 Grading credit achievement</b>	
Section 6	Capacity Building and Staff Development	
Section 7	External Relations	
Section 8	Assessment	
Section 9	Quality Assurance	
Section 10	Awarding: <b>9.1 Adding credit information to certificates and notification of results</b> <b>9.2 Mutual recognition of credit achievements between awarding bodies operating within the CQFW</b>	

## **Introduction to the Credit and Qualification Framework for Wales from the CQFW Secretariat**

*The Credit and Qualification Framework for Wales (CQFW) has been developed to encourage more young people and adults living in Wales to participate in learning. It enables small learning achievements (credits) to be formally recognised. These credits may be accumulated towards qualifications, allowing both adults and young people to learn in a manner that suits their needs. Existing qualifications frameworks are not being replaced. However, recognition of partial achievement within those qualifications will be available for individuals who otherwise might be considered not to have succeeded if they were unable to continue their studies or fell at the final exam hurdle.*

*The vision:*

*A single credit and qualification framework for Wales will:*

- support the development of an inclusive society where everyone has the opportunity to fulfil their potential;*
- assist in removing barriers to progression;*
- promote recognition of the skills required to support economic growth in Wales;*
- offer parity in the recognition of achievement for learners of all ages, whether they are learning in the workplace, community, at school, college or university.*

*This allows Learners to explain to others the relative value of their award to transfer their knowledge and skills between career paths, providers and even countries and provides employers with a much clearer picture of what employees/learners know and can do;*

*Employers gain a means of comparing the value of applicants' and employees' achievements and a clearer way of expressing the skills and qualifications applicants need.*

*Credit is:*

- a currency for learning achievement that provides a measure of learning outcomes achievable in learning time at a given level; and*
- an award made to a learner in recognition of the verified achievement of designated learning outcomes at a specified level.*

*One credit within the Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales equates to learning outcomes achievable in 10 hours of learning time. The level of learning has usually been determined by the qualification being studied or the year of study within a particular programme of learning. Now, credit level descriptors have been developed to*

*promote a more generic understanding of level as an indicator of the demand, complexity, depth of study and the autonomy expected of the learner. These descriptors of credit and credit levels, widely accepted across Wales, Northern Ireland and England, ensure that any unit can be located at the correct level. They span the full spectrum of post-compulsory learning from Entry level to postgraduate and professional learning at Level 8.*

*Credit levels are:*

- indicators of relative demand, complexity, depth of study and learner autonomy; and used to locate units or modules.*
- units or modules of learning that can only be assigned to one credit level*

*The development of the CQFW has been overseen by ACCAC, ELWA and HEFCW and developed in conjunction and consultation with awarding bodies, OCN, Ufi, training providers, further and higher education, Sector Skills Councils, DYSG, LSDA and other parties interested in developing the Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales.*

*For further details please contact the CQFW Secretariat **e-mail:** [cqfw@elwa.org.uk](mailto:cqfw@elwa.org.uk) Visit: [www.elwa.org.uk/cqfw](http://www.elwa.org.uk/cqfw)*

*This report has been part funded through the European Social Fund Objective 1 and 3*



## **Section 1: Context, history and development of credit principles in Wales**

There has been a long history of credit in Wales through different initiatives including developments in HE, the Credis project and the extensive provision through OCNs. This history entered a new stage when, in July 2001, Jane Davidson, Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning in Wales committed to having a single credit-based qualification framework operational by April 2003. The major awarding bodies – City and Guilds, Edexcel, NOCN, OCR, WJEC and the Wales OCNs – were all involved in the subsequent work that resulted in the launch of the Credit Common Accord in July 2003.

At that time the Federation of Awarding Bodies (FAB) was a relatively new organisation set up to act as a trade association for vocational awarding bodies. However FAB quickly became involved in the work on the Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales (CQFW) both to take part in the development on behalf of the wider awarding body community and also to keep the FAB members informed of the developments in the CQFW. FAB is a member of both the Credit Common Accord Forum and the CQFW Policy Reference Group.

All concerned have taken a developmental approach to the building of the policy, principles and processes that are needed to make the CQFW a reality. Lively discussions have been held in cramped and crowded rooms in many venues around Cardiff and elsewhere. Although these may have been heated at times, they have been central to working through the complex details that are a part of any credit framework and system.

CQFW through ELWa was successful in obtaining ESF funds in 2004 and this has supported a number of projects designed to make the CQFW an operational reality and thus support the life-long learning agenda in Wales. A significant amount of the ESF funds was directed to projects managed by the individual awarding bodies – City and Guilds, Edexcel, OCR, WAMITAB and WJEC – that have assigned credit to qualifications and many cases awarded credit to learners. The collaborative approach described above has allowed these projects to involve all the relevant stakeholders, including awarding bodies, centres and the regulator, ACCAC, in 'learning by doing'.

CQFW and FAB both agreed at an early stage that it was crucial to capture the lessons being learned by these awarding bodies so that these could be shared across the participants and importantly, passed on to other awarding bodies who would in time engage with the CQFW. We also wanted to give some medium-sized and smaller specialist awarding bodies the opportunity to become involved in the credit work. This would also



allow us to check that the messages emerging from the projects were applicable across the range of qualification provision.

ESF funding was made available to support this cross awarding body activity and the project is described in more detail in the next section. FAB had neither the resource nor the expertise to carry out this project itself and it contracted Credit Works to undertake this work. Credit Works have reported regularly to FAB and this comparative analysis is a key milestone in the FAB project. The report will allow FAB to provide CQFW with a full analysis of the activity and identification of issues that need further discussion within the Credit Common Accord developments.

## **Section 2: Background to the Project**

### **1. Summary**

This section describes briefly the aims and activities of the FAB project in Wales which led to this report. A related European Social Fund (ESF) Objective 1 and Objective 3 Capacity Building project in Wales is also briefly described. The methodology leading to this report's analysis is provided, and the purpose and relationship between this report and the related guidance document is explained.

### **2. Project Outline and Relationship to other ESF Project**

There were two separate but closely related projects which supported the implementation of the CQFW during 2004-5. The project leading to this report, referred to in this report as 'the FAB project', was led by the Federation of Awarding Bodies (FAB) to support the CQFW implementation strategy. The work was funded by ESF and matched funds from the CQFW partnership.

This FAB project built on another CQFW ESF project which had begun earlier in 2004 and through which five awarding bodies and one SSC were supported to develop their systems and processes to assign and award credit to learners in Wales. This earlier project, referred to in this report as 'the Building Capacity project', continued its work alongside the FAB project. In summary the purpose of the Building Capacity project was to:

- Build capacity and support implementation of the CQFW by identifying the processes and resources needed by awarding bodies to assign and award credit
- Resolve issues regarding processes and quality assurance needed to meet awarding body and CQFW requirements
- Allow awarding bodies to make necessary business decisions associated with commitment to the CQFW
- Provide support to awarding bodies to facilitate such decisions
- Roll out credit based learning programmes to learners in Wales.

Specifically the five awarding bodies (subsequently referred to in the FAB project as the First Wave group) were:

- Assigning credit to existing qualifications
- Developing processes and capacity in the development of credit based qualifications
- Learning the implications for IT systems, data capture, and certification and preparing for these
- Communicating the principles and purposes of the CQFW internally, and externally to customers and partners in Wales

The overarching purpose of the FAB project was to analyse the lessons learned across awarding bodies and share and spread those lessons more widely across awarding bodies in FAB membership. The specific aims of the FAB project were therefore to:

- Support the work of up to 4 other awarding bodies to be able to assign credit to qualifications offered by them in Wales.
- Provide updating and training to the awarding bodies in FAB membership on the assigning and awarding of credit in Wales. This to take the form of 5 workshops and a series of individual meetings during the life of the project.
- Undertake a comparative analysis of awarding body experience of assigning and awarding credit within the project in Wales; as a result of this analysis to produce update reports in Q4 of 2004, Q1 and 2 of 2005 and a final report in Q4 2005.
- Produce a guidance document, including examples of good practice, for use by awarding bodies offering qualifications within the CQFW.

This report constitutes the comparative analysis in point three above. The guidance document referred to in the final point is a separate publication, *Learning from experience – implementing credit in the CQFW: A Good Practice Guide for Awarding Bodies*. This Guidance is due to be published in early 2006.

The First Wave group in the Building Capacity project began the work on assigning credit in 2004. Awarding of credit began in 2005. This FAB project began its work in the summer of 2004. The four “other” awarding bodies (later referred to as the Second Wave group) began the process of assigning credit in spring 2005. A list of awarding bodies involved in the project can be found at Appendix 1.

### **3. Methodology for Comparative Analysis**

A key aim and task of the FAB project was to undertake a comparative analysis of awarding body practice in developing and offering credit-based qualifications for the CQFW in the ESF project, focussing on their experience of assigning and awarding credit and the development of appropriate quality assurance processes.

Work on the analysis of credit practice was on-going from July 2004 and informed Credit Works’ Interim Reports for FAB and ELWa in December 04 and March 05. Detailed analysis was undertaken in July and August 2005.<sup>1</sup>

The methodology comprised desk research, telephone interviews with key stakeholders; investigation and analysis of findings; production of a report and guidance using outcomes of the investigation and analysis.

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<sup>1</sup> See Appendix 4 for a list of primary and secondary sources

**Desk research** included:

- Study and analysis of all stakeholder project reports [including formal written reports and presentations made to meetings, stakeholder internal and external evaluation reports, as they were made available to Credit Works]
- Examination of minutes of relevant meetings, including in particular meetings of the ESF Implementation Group, Second Wave Group, relevant FAB Credit and Framework Group, Credit Common Accord Forum and information/reports from other relevant events.
- Analysis of discussion or position papers presented by stakeholders to the above fora.
- Examination of data and information from ACCAC Quality Assurance Monitoring Reports
- Data collected and analysis made by Credit Works of credit practice, including a mini-survey of awarding bodies in the project in November 04 and interim reports in December 04 and March 05.
- Guidance and tools generated by Credit Works (and others) to assist in-project design of credit based products for the CQFW.

### ***Email questionnaires and telephone interviews***

A set of common question prompts helped to shape a comparative qualitative analysis of credit practice in the project, provided a framework for discussion and ensured that all stakeholder organisations involved in the project were able to contribute. In some cases there was a need to ask for additional information and views to those provided in written reports to ELWa.

Question prompts were based on initial analysis from the desk research. Credit Works provided a summary of key points from each interview to each stakeholder interviewed. The interviews focused on the key representatives in stakeholder organisations, but were not necessarily limited to those representatives.

### ***Report***

A draft report was produced in September 2005 and circulated to members of the FAB Credit and Framework Group for comment. The final report was produced for FAB in October 2005.

## **4. Relationship of Analysis to Guidance**

This report and analysis is not a comparative evaluation of performance of awarding bodies, nor is it a critique of the CQFW, nor the FAB project or the ESF project as a whole. This document aims to be a critical but positive analysis of awarding body credit practice. It has directed and informed the development of guidance for all awarding bodies engaged in the CQFW and the suggested ways forward which will help FAB and its membership plan for CQFW implementation in the future. The analysis in

this report also provides the source material and substantiating evidence for *Learning from experience – implementing credit in the CQFW: A Good Practice Guide for Awarding Bodies* to be published early in 2006. In particular this report and the guidance document aim to:

- Inform and support the development of credit practice in Wales
- Develop and provide reliable guidance and examples of good practice around assigning and awarding credit
- Foster development of positive credit practice to support the necessary reforms to be made to awarding body products, processes and systems
- Support awarding bodies in their preparations for offering credit-based qualifications in Wales from 2006.

## **Section 3: Summary of key findings**

### **Introduction**

This section summarises the key points to emerge from the analysis of credit practice in Wales. Full details, including descriptions of the activities, detailed analysis, discussion of the issues raised, and where appropriate suggested ways forward, can be found in the relevant sections of the report.

### **Assigning credit**

- In the main credit was assigned to existing qualifications accredited in the NQF. It was clear however that this involved more than simply adding numbers to existing qualifications. In addition to learning how to apply credit principles in practice, awarding bodies learned important lessons on designing new credit based qualifications for the future. These lessons are analysed in the report.
- Awarding body decisions on which qualifications to include in the CQFW were largely driven by business interests and customer demand. The need to build capacity and manage change internally also affected their choice of qualifications.
- Some qualifications were more conducive to being revised or redesigned as credit based than others. This depended largely on key design characteristics and features (described fully in the report but including for example whether a qualification was designed in small units each at a specified level). Relative complexity also affected the decisions on which qualifications to include in the CQFW.
- There were specific technical challenges in assigning credit to GQs in particular, and to NVQs. The project enabled these technical issues to be examined and analysed in some depth, and some awarding bodies began to model possible solutions which now require further collaborative work to take forward. Ultimately however it was the design characteristics of the qualification, rather than the qualification type necessarily, which determined the relative difficulty in assigning credit.
- Awarding bodies were able to develop processes for assigning credit which were largely based on their existing practices of qualification development. Although the processes and methodologies differed, there were key common features which are described in the report.
- The range and combination of staff used was key to achieving reliable and consistent results on credit values. With the provision of training and support, awarding body staff were able to apply their experience and expertise to assigning credit.

- The importance of professional judgements, reached through a systematic process, was central to determining credit value.
- Using (notional) Learning Time to reach decisions on credit value was new practice for awarding bodies and they therefore began the process of assigning credit less confident about this aspect of qualification/unit design. Many issues concerning Learning Time were identified and tackled during the life of the project and by the end of the work participants were largely confident about their decisions on credit value.
- Participants had more experience of judging levels and were therefore more confident about this aspect. However scrutinising the level of each unit in a qualification had not always been common practice and the project did therefore identify and tackle issues on levels of units.
- Awarding bodies recognised the need to incorporate credit into their systems and processes in a sustainable way and some were formulating plans to address this.

### **Capacity building and staff development**

- Building credit capacity within and across awarding bodies in FAB membership was a major aim and outcome of this project.
- The awarding bodies and the CQFW partners recognised their mutual interest in successfully developing and applying credit capacity.
- Learning by doing, assigning credit to awarding body qualifications in practice, led to greater understanding of strategic, technical and other issues, and helped to bring about cultural change.
- The project supported mutual learning by key stakeholders which helped to build a sense of shared ownership of the CQFW and mutual interest in its success. It was recognised that no single stakeholder had the capacity to introduce reform of this magnitude.
- Collaboration was recognised as essential but nevertheless there were some tensions between collaboration and competition between awarding bodies.
- Training activities for staff, the use of guidance materials, and practice based approaches were all factors in building capacity successfully.

### **External relations**

- Successful partnerships and collaboration had driven forward the CQFW from the start. The CQFW is itself a partnership between ELWa, ACCAC and HEFQW (backed by WAG), and awarding bodies (led by FAB) had a direct influence and helped to shape the CQFW through the Credit Common Accord (CCA) Forum and other fora.

- ACCAC played an active role as a partner in the project and had to continue to meet its (joint) legislative responsibilities alongside this developmental role.
- SSCs generally had little active engagement in this project (with the exception of SEMTA). Project partners recognised the need for their increased engagement.

## **Assessment**

- The assessment strategy for a qualification was a key design characteristic affecting how easy or difficult it was to make the qualification credit based. The implications of different assessment practices for credit based qualifications are examined in the report.
- Awarding bodies used the project to test arrangements for assessment, standardisation and verification and to identify possible changes to assessment practice in the short, medium and long term.
- Some awarding bodies used the project to examine issues in applying mark based assessment to credit based units and qualifications. Analysis indicated that credit based units could be designed to accommodate mark based assessment.
- There was little historical experience of grading credit achievements and some awarding bodies therefore used the project to examine the issues around grading and to develop potential solutions.

## **Quality Assurance**

- Existing awarding body systems for quality assurance were successfully applied to credit based qualifications.
- External quality assurance professionals (moderators, verifiers etc) played a key role in assigning credit, and their potential role in post accreditation quality assurance of credit began to emerge as credit based qualifications were used in the field.
- There was some evidence that provider and employer demand for more customised learning packages may change with the introduction of credit, which could have implications for quality assurance systems in the longer term.
- New regulations for the CQFW were drafted for use in the project then shaped and informed by practice and experience. This approach, whereby CQFW principles and criteria were trialled and revised in a systematic way, was welcomed by awarding bodies. The development of CQFW regulations depended on open collaboration and mutual trust between key stakeholders with ACCAC taking responsibility for their application and interpretation.



## **Awarding credit**

- Awarding bodies adapted their existing awarding systems to the demands of the CQFW for the purposes of this project. However they identified issues, signalled in the report, in using and managing credit information amongst stakeholders and for wider implementation for the future.
- It was felt important that learners receiving credit certificates as a result of the project should have confidence in their validity beyond Wales.
- Awarding bodies in the project began to explore a model for mutual recognition. Evidence from the project suggested that mutual recognition of the value of credit was needed amongst the *full* range of stakeholders to provide maximum benefit for learners. Some of the conditions for mutual recognition were discussed with project participants and these are explored in the report.

## **Challenges**

- There were specific technical and operational issues concerning APL, GQs, and grading which were identified and examined in the project. From initial discussion of these issues it is clear that they now require further development, including the development of new practices which will need to be trialled and closely monitored over time.

## **Section 4. Assigning Credit**

### **1. Summary**

In this section we look at assigning credit and level to qualifications in the project. We examine the rationale for selecting qualifications; features and characteristics which affect assigning credit; and the drivers which influenced the choices awarding bodies made.

We examine the process of assigning, including who was involved and the methodologies adopted. We identify the significant specific issues raised through assigning credit and level, including the nature of units; (notional) learning time; levels; and specific issues related to NVQs. (General Qualifications are addressed briefly but examined more fully in Section 5.2)

Finally we look at the lessons learned overall and their application in the future.

### **2. Introduction**

The assigning of credit and level to qualifications by awarding bodies for their inclusion in the CQFW was the major strand of work for this project. Awarding bodies in the project were, in the main, assigning credit and level to *existing* qualifications.

Apart from this one criterion there was no prescription on the qualifications chosen as this was a voluntary awarding body activity. The features of the qualifications chosen, and the rationale for their choice, therefore reveal some interesting insights.

### **3. Summary of qualifications in the project**

Nine awarding bodies were working to assign credit and level and submit qualifications to the CQFW during the project: five in the First Wave (City & Guilds, Edexcel, OCR, WAMITAB, and WJEC), and four in the Second Wave (AMSPAR, ASET, CACHE and NCFE). First Wave awarding bodies received ESF matched funding to support the development and began the process in summer 2004. Second Wave bodies were supported by FAB and Credit Works during the process of assigning but were not given funding to support development. They began the development process in spring 2005 and submitted qualifications to ACCAC by summer 2005.

During the project a wide range of units and qualifications, from NVQs and VRQs to GCSEs/GCEs and from Entry level to level 4 were submitted to the process of assigning. A wide range of subject and sector areas was covered including: catering, early years, enterprise, employment skills, tourism, administration, retail, customer service, IT users, history, horticulture, waste management, public service and performing arts. The

profile of learners and the learning contexts targeted by the qualifications was extensive, ranging from 16-18 year olds in schools to adults undertaking in-house company training. A full list of qualifications developed can be found at Appendix 2.

Where amendments were proposed to existing jointly regulated NQF qualifications, these were submitted for approval to the regulatory authorities. Amendments were approved through the joint regulatory process, and credits and qualifications were awarded to a number of learners who completed the awards at the time of writing. However one awarding body chose to go through the process of assigning but not awarding for the purposes of this project. In addition a Second Wave awarding body chose to assign credit and level to an existing qualification which had not previously been accredited in the NQF. This qualification was therefore assigned credit and level, submitted to QCA for accreditation, and then to the CQFW.

#### **4. Rationale for choice of qualifications**

On analysis it is clear that the two main drivers for selecting qualifications to become credit-based were:

- Business interests and customer demand
- Building capacity and managing change internally

Many awarding bodies cited business reasons for their choice of qualifications for the project, selecting qualifications where they knew there was a demand for the flexibility that credit offers.

*The decision to select these qualifications was a business one, based on market feedback on the original qualification and confirmed through discussions with customers. It had already been decided that there was demand for free standing qualifications in Moving and Handling so the decision to make a suite of smaller qualifications made business sense as it reduces duplication and results in more responsive marketable products. (ASET)*

Other business drivers included the opportunity to link this project's work with other strategic initiatives in the business. Some awarding bodies chose on the basis of the role and importance of the qualification in Wales, and/or because of the numbers of centres or a key strategic partnership involving the qualification in Wales. Faced with choice managers also selected qualifications which were due for review and development or in one instance which had been reviewed in anticipation of credit development.

*...some existing recent qualifications had anticipated the introduction of credit – with smaller units and with level assigned to them. These were also targeted. (City & Guilds)*

Building capacity and introducing change was a key aim of participating awarding bodies and they chose their qualifications in order to maximise

the opportunities for this. For the First Wave awarding bodies especially, ESF funding support and a longer timeframe for development allowed a range of qualifications to be selected which increased involvement of professional staff and helped ensure that the range of issues to be tackled were identified through the project.

*...the ones chosen provide a broad spectrum which enables us to involve many Professional Officers, learn lessons across the range and build credit sense more widely. (OCR)*

*Another aim was to build credit awareness in the organisation and use the opportunity to do some internal capacity building in City & Guilds. (City & Guilds)*

For Second Wave bodies, qualifications were chosen carefully to allow more staff to be involved.

*Employment Skills is not subject specific, like sport or travel – more cross company staff would be involved spreading the benefit of the project across our organisation. (NCFE)*

A shorter timeframe however meant choosing qualifications less likely to present significant issues and difficulties.

*We felt that by reviewing a smaller qualification, discrepancy in relative size of units was less likely to occur. (NCFE)*

In the First Wave awarding bodies WJEC had a significantly different profile from the others in the project in that 90% of its business was in General Qualifications (GQs) and uniquely it also awarded the Welsh Baccalaureate Qualification (WBQ). Its rationale for selecting qualifications was political as well as being driven by business and capacity needs.

*In the case of the Welsh Baccalaureate, this was expected to be included by WAG and could of course offer the prime application for a credit system in Wales. Other choices were motivated by priorities for Wales and to some degree we were trying to get a spread of WJEC qualifications. The truth is that 90% of our business is in GCE and GCSE. (WJEC)*

At the time of writing credit was not assigned to WJEC General Qualifications, although there was an expectation that this would be achieved in part by March 2006. WJEC identified and faced significant issues in its attempts to assign credit to its General Qualifications. These issues are explored in Section 5.2.

In addition to these two main drivers for choice awarding bodies generally selected qualifications which presented fewer difficulties and problems with assigning credit. There were exceptions to this but it was recognised that some qualifications lent themselves more readily to credit (see below) and at this stage, where they could, awarding bodies avoided qualifications they knew would pose more difficulties.

## 5. Lessons learned on choice of qualifications

### Qualification Design

The relative difficulty of assigning credit and level depended significantly on the design of the existing qualification. There were some features of designs which lent themselves to credit, some features which raised issues to be tackled, and at the other extreme other features which made use of credit especially difficult.

Features which lent themselves to credit included:

- Achievements already organised into small units
- Each unit at a specified level
- Independent units capable of separate assessment
- No synoptic assessment

*... units should be capable of being independently assessed, quality-assured and awarded. No qualifications have 'synoptic' units and no unit's achievement depends on the achievement of another unit. These design principles have meant that it has been possible to assign credit to existing qualifications without any need to make any changes to their design, structure, assessment or quality assurance. (OCR First INTERIM Report)*

*All our qualifications offer unit based assessment anyway so this wasn't really an issue; neither is grading... (We are) already using internal and external moderation and unit based assessment which seem to work well with credit. (ASET)*

*We were in the process of removing the external assessment component from the qualification anyway – so this scope to remove it was convenient for us... removal of the (synoptic) external assessment component makes unit achievement and certification more straightforward – now when you get the four units you get the qualification. (NCFE)*

*...the qualifications chosen worked with credit – no synoptic assessment, and units could be used on a 'stand alone' basis or integrated for delivery. (EDEXCEL)*

In addition qualifications which were designed with units of the same size and level were generally easier to assign credit to, although the process of assigning did raise issues for some awarding bodies (see Issues Raised below). Often these types of qualifications anticipated a structured learning programme and were designed with a notional scheme of learning in mind which made the process of assigning credit more straightforward. In effect the awarding body had in part anticipated the learning time needed in its design of the qualification.

*Some qualifications such as OCR Nationals are designed with units of the same size and level. They anticipate a structured programme of learning and input. As such, when ensuring the size of a unit, a notional scheme of learning is created as part of the development process. Such qualifications*

*are often the simplest to assign credit to. In contrast some qualifications, such as NVQs, or OCR CLAIT, are built around the functions that determine the skills and knowledge required.* (OCR First Interim Report)

Features of qualifications which raised some issues for awarding bodies in attempting to assign credit included:

- Qualifications with large units (in one case 140 (notional) learning hours)
- Synoptic assessment – where award of credit is dependent on achievement of more than one unit
- Examinations and tests
- Grading of credit awarded

The issues that arose are discussed in relevant sections of this report. In addition there were some specific issues raised around assigning credit to NVQs. An examination of some of the issues raised in assigning is given below.

However the most significant issues and difficulties were identified in assigning credit and level to General Qualifications. In general these were related to design features such as:

- Multiple levels in a single qualification (e.g. GCSEs incorporating more than one level of achievement)
- How/where learning outcomes and assessment criteria were specified in the existing qualification
- Assessment, including the use of mark-based assessment and assessment structures
- Awarding structures and their relationship to the above

These features of GQs, which often ran counter to the credit principles in the CCA, are explored more fully in Section 5.2.

In addition to the design and technical issues of assigning credit to GQs, there were important political implications in assigning credit to GCEs and GCSEs which are popularly perceived to be of equal value and size.

It is worth noting that OCR had planned to assign to both GQs and VQs. It recognised the relative difficulty of assigning to GQs and elected to tackle assigning of VQs first. Having subsequently tackled GQs it recognised that the credit values it assigned were very provisional but nevertheless valued the lessons learned from the process.

## **6. The Process for Assigning Credit and Level**

Whilst the CQFW Credit Common Accord (CCA) which was developed in conjunction with a working group consisting of Awarding Bodies, Regulatory Authorities, Open College Networks and others provided information and guidance on the principles for assigning, there was no prescription or specific guidance on the process or method to be used. Generally awarding bodies found this lack of prescription helpful. It

enabled them to develop and test out processes based on their existing approaches to qualification design and approval.

*The Common Accord guidance was helpful, specific enough and not prescriptive on process – very important for us to have this scope in the project. We were pleased it was flexible enough for WAMIATB to conduct the project. (WAMITAB)*

Developing process based on existing practice was common across most of the project participants and there were many similarities and characteristics shared in the processes used.

### **Who was involved**

There was a pattern across the awarding bodies in the roles, expertise and composition of those involved in the assigning process. The following features were common:

- Initial training/briefings were provided for the staff involved. This training was provided by key staff involved in or managing the CQFW project and was supplemented by guidance drawn from CQFW documents. A basic understanding and familiarity with credit principles and their application (in general and as they are represented in the CQFW CCA) was therefore required of those involved in assigning. (See Section 6. Capacity Building and Staff Development for more details)
- The project manager or key worker with more experience and a more developed understanding of credit was involved in the process of assigning.
- A combination of internal staff and key “independent” staff such as external examiners and consultants was used. (See also Section 9. Quality Assurance)
- A range of experience and expertise was used including qualification development, assessment, subject expertise, delivery, and moderation/verification.

*We used a credit expert, a subject specific expert, a practitioner, and an External Verifier. We designed documents, and slotted the ‘assigning of credit’ into our qualification design process (EDEXCEL)*

*These staff are responsible for managing the development of vocational qualifications and their day to day management. In addition, Professional Officers work with a range of external consultants such as Chief Examiners, Moderators etc who often contribute to developing qualifications and writing assessment material. Typically, these consultants are also teachers or trainers as well as experts in their subject/sector. (OCR First Interim Report)*

*All the qualifications development team were involved [4 officers + assessment manager]: The assessment manager particularly focusing on*

*checking assessment criteria and methods. The Chief Assessor, a training provider writing distance learning materials, and H&S tutors were also consulted. (ASET)*

All these common features appear critical to successful outcomes. Notwithstanding the fact that this was a "learning by doing" project, an understanding of the principles of credit, as well as the key technical features was essential to developing consistent results. All the awarding bodies provided some training/development though it varied in nature and extent according to their particular profile, context and perceived needs. All provided guidance materials and had staff with more experience of credit working alongside less experienced staff in the project.

The combination of staff used was also a critical feature. Internal professional staff provided experience of the qualifications and the regulatory requirements and context, including experience of credit. This contributed to the consistent application of the credit principles and any awarding body design, and helped to ensure consistency of assigning across qualifications. Independent staff provided the wider or specialist perspective and helped to ensure robust decisions. (See also Section 9 Quality Assurance)

The range of expertise and experience used proved critical in reaching sound professional judgements, particularly on credit value. Here the experience of the range of different contexts and learners who might achieve the units was essential to reaching sound judgements on the learning time required to achieve the units. (See also Section 4.7 (Notional) Learning Time).

*On new material when they were asked for a view the consultants seemed more insecure... not happy to come to a final conclusion... This showed us that we needed the right mix of expertise among consultants to make confident decisions on credit value. (City & Guilds)*

Not all awarding bodies used practitioners/centres directly. However all used people with practitioner experience, some used practitioners directly in the assigning process and others consulted with practitioners to check/support their assigning decisions.

### **Process and methodology**

All the awarding bodies used different processes based on their current approaches to the development and approval of qualifications. The methodologies varied significantly, ranging from panel processes, which brought experts together in a meeting, to telephone interviews by a small project team gathering data then reaching decisions in consultation with the Chief Moderator.

Methodologies included:

- Use of expert panels followed by testing out assigning decisions with awarding body centres



- Briefing of external consultants using an awarding body's own customised guide; followed by cross checking of decisions using internal expertise and then regulator involvement in finalising decisions.
- Devising an internal process using existing expertise and a 'scorecard' approach.
- Staff development for qualification writers; followed by assigning credit in expert workshops; followed by cross curricular internal scrutiny and regulator approval.

The following features were common to assigning processes:

- Initial training/development and briefings as above.
- The use of guidance documents and tools to support people through the process. All awarding bodies drew on the CQFW documents, especially the CCA and the NICATS level descriptors. Most Second Wave bodies also used the guidance on assigning drawn up by Credit Works based on the experience of the First Wave bodies<sup>2</sup>. All the awarding bodies either supplemented guidance documents with their own documents or drew up their own from the outset based on that provided but contextualised for their own qualifications.

In addition some of the awarding bodies collected and used data from their own systems and/or from centres to support the process.

*Staff were provided with a Guide to assigning credit. This Guide had been created using core documentation provided by ELWa, but re-written as a users' Guide to assigning credit. It was also contextualised to OCR's qualifications and processes and was designed for use with OCR's external consultants. (OCR First Interim Report)*

*(We used) CCA, the Credit Works checklist and our own tool based on these... We used data including age profiles, previous qualifications, backgrounds of learners etc to help reach a clear view of the average learner or learners on average. Together with the provider expertise this worked well. (CACHE)*

- A combination of independent judgements and then collective judgements was used. Even those awarding bodies using panel processes had asked those participating to reach their own initial decision (sometimes in pairs) based on their experience and expertise. This was regarded as important in ensuring rigour in the process, avoiding undue influence and providing as much objectivity as possible before coming together to make decisions. It also enabled the rationale for the decisions to be clear. In the larger awarding bodies with more staff involved this was clearly documented to enable an audit of decisions, something regarded as particularly important when introducing this new dimension.

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<sup>2</sup> The assigning credit checklist can be found in *Learning from experience – implementing credit in the CQFW - A Good Practice Guide for Awarding Bodies to be published in 2006.*

*Each consultant would then work in isolation with the Guide to arrive at a credit value for each identified unit and submit them postally, together with a report outlining how comfortable they were with the process and the usefulness of the Guide and supporting documentation (OCR First Interim Report)*

*Professional Officers, who are experienced in conducting awarding and moderating meetings, chaired review meetings with the aim of reaching agreement about the credit values assigned to the selected units. Further guidance was issued at the meetings with the intention of overcoming the inconsistencies in the area of learning time. (OCR Second Interim Report)*

*...we went ahead and prepared documentation based on the ACCAC form and the Checklist provided by Credit Works and panel members used this independently before coming together to discuss their views. (CACHE)*

*To ask the internal member of staff and the assessor to work independently using the guidance and procedure provided, and then compare their recommendations using external expertise. (WAMITAB)*

*...a group discussion would not necessarily produce objective results. Talking to people individually meant that centre staff gave us their views based on their own experience – without the influence of others. We then considered their responses and came to a conclusion using the response data. (NCFE)*

*...being so new we have to be able to track back the rationale leading to all decisions so we build confidence in the outcomes. (OCR)*

- The importance of professional judgements in reaching decisions was recognised and reflected in all the processes. All the awarding bodies used the CCA guidance which provided examples of activities which might contribute to learning time. Some used highly systematic processes for considering each of the activities cited in relation to their units and recording their judgements. Others used them more as a check to confirm or question decisions reached. The evidence we have indicates that whilst all the awarding bodies were systematic, the degree of formality in their process varied according to the size and complexity of the organisation and its internal<sup>3</sup> culture. However all the awarding bodies came to recognise that assigning is ultimately a professional judgement reached through a systematic process. This issue is explored further in Section 4.7 below under (Notional) Learning Time.

*We have learned how professional judgement is so important in making decisions where credit is concerned. (EDEXCEL)*

*Real experience of use of these NVQs mattered - alongside the guidance. It was important to understand that examples of learning activities that*

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*could be included in calculating credit values were just that – examples – and not essentials. Useful in guiding us to our conclusions on credit values. (WAMITAB)*

*On assigning credit value they were not so comfortable. They had a better feeling for 'average' time in relation to classroom contact for example, for time associated with other activities they were not so sure. When we used a grid to help them think about this - it helped. But it was still important to stand back and reflect on whether the judgements made using the grid looked right... (City & Guilds)*

## **7. Specific Issues Raised in Assigning Credit to Units**

The CCA provided design principles for units which state that:

*Learning to which a credit value is to be assigned must be structured into units, which conform to the following specification:*

*A unit may be of any size but must include:*

- a. a coherent and explicit set of Learning Outcomes with associated Assessment Criteria; and*
  - b. should be uniquely identifiable by code and title.*
- (Credit Common Accord, ELWa 2003)

The CCA also stated that a unit must include learning outcomes, assessment criteria, credit value (number of credits at a credit level), and unit title and code.

It is clear from the evidence that how these principles were interpreted and applied to the qualifications in the project varied somewhat. This manifested itself in the way awarding bodies maintained or adapted the format for the units used in the existing qualifications.

Generally it appears that units submitted contain significant additional information to the specification given by the CCA. The specification of course was a minimum one but the additional information (such as content and delivery information) supplied as part of the unit made it more difficult to isolate the *required* unit information and make comparisons across units presented in different formats. The additional information also seemed likely to lead to differences in the degree of specificity of the learning outcomes presented by different awarding bodies. For example outcomes may be less precisely specified where additional information is supplied under content. Assessment criteria may be similarly affected.

There was not, at the time the First Wave awarding bodies embarked on the exercise in 2004, a common format for unit design and presentation which would have helped to highlight this issue. Therefore some First Wave bodies submitted units which do not appear to match the full unit specification described in the CCA.

*... we simply reviewed the NVQs in relation to credit value. We did not turn them into credit based units with learning outcomes, assessment criteria etc. (WAMITAB)*

The Second Wave awarding bodies used a unit template supplied by Credit Works which matched the specification in the CCA. Whilst this is no judgement on the actual quality of the units themselves, the common format did produce more consistency in how, and how precisely, learning outcomes and assessment criteria were specified and presented. This also made comparisons across units from different awarding bodies an easier exercise.

However the introduction of a unit template did not resolve many of the issues relating to assigning experienced by the awarding bodies and explored in this and other sections of this report. There remained issues, for example, in how assessment criteria were specified, the degree of clarity required in assessment criteria and the nature of their relationship to the learning outcomes. However the common unit template seemed to enable greater consistency and clarity in specifying the achievement required, and it enabled the value of achievements to be more easily compared across awarding bodies' units.

The First Wave awarding bodies were of course using unit formats which were familiar to them and which were consistent across their own qualifications (and/or across types of qualifications such as NVQs). The issue of comparing outcomes of assigning across awarding bodies has not yet been pursued although it has been raised by some in the project. (see Section 6 Capacity Building and Staff Development)

The awarding bodies have recognised the impact of credit on unit design and development, and the importance of training and development to support this. Second Wave awarding bodies appeared not to have problems in using the unit format provided. However this format has not been tested with the First Wave group.

*It will be important to have training for both those who write the unit syllabus/learning outcomes and assessment criteria together so the unit is cohesive from the outset and minimal amendments will be necessary before submission. (CACHE)*

## **(Notional) Learning Time and Credit Value**

**Definitions and Application** - Ascribing credit value to a unit depended on reaching a judgement on Learning Time because credit value is based on the Learning Time attached to the learning outcomes and credit level. One credit is assigned for learning outcomes achievable in 10 hours of learning time.

The Credit Common Accord (CCA) defined Learning Time as,

*a measure of the learning substance of a unit or whole qualification. It is related to the amount of time a typical learner might be expected to take to complete all of the learning relevant to the achievement of the learning outcomes.*

Learning Time is 'notional' in that it is recognised that the actual time taken to achieve the outcomes of a unit will vary from learner to learner. These variations will of course depend on the individual, their abilities, aptitudes and motivation. This is true even where the learners' experience is almost identical as in formally taught courses with a high level of tutor input and directed study.

However many units in the CQFW may be taught and learnt through a wide variety of contexts and modes of delivery, ranging from college, community to workplace, and from formal taught courses to on-line learning. The amount of "delivery" or taught time may vary considerably in these different contexts, as will the expectations and reality of time spent in say private study or revision.

Some units, such as NVQ units, are based on the concept of competence, independent and separate from notions of teaching and courses, and in their purest form concerned only with recognition of skills and knowledge acquired in the workplace. Qualifications assessed only through external examination place different demands on awarding bodies and providers, where there is no requirement for continuous internal assessment of progress and achievement. The concept of time spent learning and achieving can appear alien and incongruent to awarding bodies operating in such contexts.

In addition for some units in the framework, the profile of learners who may achieve the units can be very diverse, varying for example from a 17year old in full time education to an adult returner, learning part time at work or in the community. The variations in learner profiles could cover previous attainment, current skills, and experience of learning and how recent this is, as well as age and present circumstances.

In all these situations the understanding of Learning Time as "notional" and its use in reaching a judgement on credit value can be difficult but critical.

Awarding bodies have substantial experience and understanding of taught or contact time and of Guided Learning Hours (GLH). However using and operating Learning Time and applying the above definitions and variables are new to most people and organisations. The project participants' experience in identifying and tackling the many issues related to Learning Time was therefore particularly valuable.

Not surprisingly most awarding bodies in the project reported that they had more difficulty and less confidence in assigning credit using Learning Time than they did in assigning level. Whilst issues around level did occur, those participating already had substantial experience and understanding

of the application of level through the NQF. However, despite their unfamiliarity and relative lack of confidence in using Learning Time, it was notable that by the end of the project all the awarding bodies reported feeling confident or reasonably confident about the judgements they reached on credit values.

**Typical Learners** - Many of the project participants however struggled with the concept of a “*typical learner*” (extracted from CCA definition). Some argued that it was an unhelpful construct. Others incorporated discussion to reach an agreed understanding of the “*typical learner*” into their process for assigning. One such awarding body had an exceptional example of deferring a decision on credit value for one qualification as those involved had such diverse experience of the profile of learners that they were not able to agree a “*typical learner*” and hence the time it would take them to achieve the outcomes of the units. (Note; the decision to defer was taken in part because the qualification was due for revision in any event)

On analysis it was clear that some awarding body staff were interpreting the CCA definition more literally, trying to come up with an agreed profile of the typical learner for the unit (in some cases this became translated as the average learner), and then using this profile as the basis for determining the time expected for this “*typical learner*” to achieve the outcomes. Credit Works’ advice to project participants therefore was to replace the concept of:

*the amount of time a typical learner might be expected to take to complete all of the learning relevant to the achievement of the learning outcomes,*

with the concept of,

*the amount of time learners on average might be expected to take to complete all of the learning relevant to the achievement of the learning outcomes<sup>4</sup>.*

It must be said that whilst some awarding body staff felt that this distinction was extremely useful and overcame difficulties they were experiencing in trying to conceive of a “*typical*” learner, others had been interpreting the definition in that way in practice already.

**Pre-requisite learning**-In addition, and particularly in the early stages of the project, some participants needed clarification about pre-requisite learning. Some staff when working independently had included pre-requisite learning into the learning time for a unit. Similarly there was a danger that co-requisite learning (required but not specified in that particular unit) was being counted towards Learning Time. Collective discussions, moderations and quality checks used by awarding bodies tackled these issues.

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<sup>4</sup> This amendment to the CCA was agreed by the CCA Forum in September 2005

**Professional judgements** -Taking the CCA definition overall however it is clear that Learning Time is simply the measure used to reach a judgement on the "substance" of the unit. In practice, through the processes that awarding bodies developed and applied during this project, staff used their professional experience and expertise, together with any data available, to consider the range of contexts, delivery modes, and learner profiles and to agree the time on average they would expect for learners to achieve the designated outcomes. Best practice in awarding body processes ensured that there was sufficient breadth and depth of professional expertise used to reach that judgement. In effect the awarding bodies were making a professional judgement through a systematic process, using time as a commonly understood measure whilst recognising that the time is 'notional'. These professional judgements were often supplemented by data such as learner profiles and by consultation with centres and other relevant interests and experience.

Using learning time and assigning credit are new to most stakeholders. It is important that a common and consistent understanding and application of the concepts are reached if consistency in credit values and mutual trust between stakeholders is to be achieved. Many participants also recognised that 'collaborative working between awarding bodies, particularly within sector groupings, would support confidence and quality enhancement in the accuracy of the judgements and the consistency of credit values reached.

*The difficult part was arriving at NLT/credit value, especially for new qualifications where there's no actual experience of delivery. Whilst the achievements can be related to existing practice and delivery which are similar, people are more anxious about the accuracy of their estimations in these circumstances. This may be over anxiety because there's less actual evidence on which to base judgements and maybe we should just be more confident about our professional judgements, providing the process for assigning is sound. (ASET)*

*I think we now need some cross awarding body work to look at how we each assigned credit. When the project was new we were all fairly cautious about the process and about how each of us [awarding body, SEMTA] would go about it. Now we have built trust between us it is time for collaboration to share practice and test our understanding against other awarding bodies in the project. Such collaboration would also help us come to a common understanding on Learning Time for example, to move away from the 'average learner' to 'the time it takes on average for a learner to achieve...' for example. Develop mutual understanding and build mutual confidence in each other's processes. (EDEXCEL)*

## **Level**

Participants were generally more confident in assigning level to units and reported fewer difficulties and issues. This is almost certainly due to the fact that those involved had substantial experience of different levels in the NQF.

*We used The Credit Common Accord and the NICATS level descriptors – I wanted to avoid getting bogged down in too much detail. Finer detail would have confused the decision making process – I think you should take a helicopter view and use level descriptors that are short sharp and precise. The consultants we used understand what level 2 is – they teach it, have operatives that work to it... (City & Guilds)*

However some awarding bodies did identify issues with units which had been assumed to be at the level of the qualification. This assumption was called into question by the assigning process and adjustments to units were sometimes required.

Similarly some units were found to contain a mix of levels of learning outcomes and assessment criteria. Some outcomes and criteria were found to be at a level above or below the pre-existing level of the unit. Again this was revealed by the assigning process and adjustments to units made.

In developing whole qualifications awarding body processes had inevitably tended to focus on level of the qualification as a whole. The scrutiny and focus on level of individual units was less common prior to the project and constituted a development of new practice for most of the awarding bodies in the project.

There were also issues of level which were particular to NVQs and these are discussed alongside other NVQ issues below.

## **NVQs**

**NVQ units** are units of competence, designed around the functions of particular occupations. They are conceived as competences not as outcomes of learning, and NVQ units therefore do not describe or include learning outcomes.

*Our assessment practice is to view NVQs as measurements of competence rather than outcomes from training. (WAMITAB)*

Nevertheless awarding bodies in the project were able to assign credit to NVQ units and were reasonably confident in the degree of accuracy and consistency of the values assigned. The most substantial experience from this project was through WAMITAB, although City & Guilds also assigned to NVQ units. They found that the concept of Learning Time can be applied to NVQ units.

*We focussed on an exercise which involved taking a unit from the NVQ in Customer Service– Representing Yourself and Your Organisation; then examined the knowledge and performance requirements; and consultants were asked to determine the level of the unit. (City & Guilds)*



NVQs are unitised qualifications and the experience of this project indicates that they are first and foremost perceived as whole qualifications. Because it is the whole qualification which assures competence for an occupational role, less prominence is placed on the achievement of individual units. The design assumes achievement of the whole qualification to be primary.

*We had never looked at NVQ units in isolation before – we (and the sector) tend to view NVQs only as whole qualifications. (WAMITAB)*

The importance of achieving whole qualifications is not incompatible with the credit system where rules of combination can still be used to ensure competence in an occupational area. Whole qualifications which are unitised are however fundamentally different conceptually from a unit based system where qualifications are built up from the units. The unit based system requires practitioners and designers to place more emphasis on units. This will have other implications for the design of all qualifications. There are particular implications for NVQs in relation to level (see below).

**NVQ Levels** -Because NVQs are designed primarily as whole qualifications they are levelled as whole qualifications using the NVQ level descriptors. Individual units within the NVQ are not necessarily levelled in this way. It is not unusual therefore to find units which are common to NVQs of different levels. For example exactly the same unit may be found in NVQ level 1 and level 2 qualifications. Before the project this practice was accepted and implicit for one NVQ awarding body. The assigning of credit would make this practice explicit: henceforward a candidate achieving a level 2 unit through a level 1 qualification would be exempted from having to achieve it again at level 2.

In addition there are currently 5 level descriptors for NVQs where there are 8 levels plus Entry level for the CQFW. These factors clearly have design implications in the longer term if NVQs are to become genuinely credit based, and pose issues for the interim in assigning credit to existing or new NVQ units, especially above level 3. We assume the design principles for new NOS take account of these existing differences and future demands.

In the longer term those designing units and qualifications for competence in occupations will need to ensure that each unit is correctly assigned a level which matches agreed credit level descriptors. Even more importantly they will need to ensure that the level of units specified in the rules of combination for the qualification achievement meet the necessary level of competence for the occupation. In other words the level of each unit as well as the level of the whole qualification will have to be considered in the design process.

In the interim very specific issues were faced and addressed by awarding bodies. Awarding bodies in the project generally found a good degree of consistency between NICATS and NVQ level descriptors at levels 1-3.

However more difficulty was encountered at the higher levels where an NVQ level 4 should be equivalent to NICATS level 4 or 5, and an NVQ level 5 should be equivalent to NICATS level 6 or 7. This disparity was magnified and complicated when NVQ units were included at different levels to those specified for the NVQ overall.

*For example a level 3 NVQ containing NVQ level 4 units could be awarded at CQFW level 5 using the NICATS descriptors. This would mean awarding a level 3 NVQ which contained level 5 units. This is not an issue unless the majority of unit achievements overall are above the level of the qualification. Then there is an issue! (WAMITAB)*

To avoid candidates falling short of full NVQ level 4 requirements two awarding bodies in the project (with common NVQ units) agreed that the highest operational level of the NVQ should be assessed for the achievement of the unit i.e. NICATS level 5 for the assessment of achievement of NVQ level 4.

This was managed amicably despite the rather 'tortuous nature' of the exercise and perhaps emphasises the need for convergence and consistency between the two sets of level descriptors.

## **8. Lessons Learned and Future Development**

There were some clear lessons which could be drawn from the evidence of this project. These can be summarised as follows.

- Some qualifications were more conducive to being revised or redesigned as credit based qualifications. This depended largely on their existing design characteristics.
- The processes that awarding bodies used in designing qualifications could be adapted to the demands of designing credit based qualifications. Staff involved were able to adapt to these additional demands.
- There were major obstacles to be overcome in designing credit based General Qualifications and NVQs. It was not within the capacity or responsibility of a single awarding body to address these issues alone.
- There were certain practices; such as using examinations and tests for assessment, and grading; which were highlighted and which require a consistent approach from the awarding bodies and the regulator. New practices will need to be trialled and closely monitored over time.
- Awarding bodies found some aspects of revising/designing qualifications (to make them credit based) easier than others. This often related to previous experience and practice. For example there was more confidence in assigning level than there was in assigning credit. It should be possible to overcome this with guidance and practice.

- There were some aspects of existing guidance and use of terminology that required clarification. For example “typical learner”, credit exemption and credit transfer. This clarification should improve the practice of awarding bodies in the project and simplify guidance for those new to credit.

The expertise gained and the new guidance generated through this project has yet to be tested in the design of new qualifications. Awarding bodies were positive about the impact of this project but realistic about its limitations and the further work to be done.

*When we develop new units from scratch it will be a different matter...*  
(NCFE)

*In the future, 3-5 years probably, units will be developed with credit automatically included. Therefore the units will look different from those seen currently aimed at 'NVQs'.* (WAMITAB)

*We have learned though that the process needs time to develop the skills and experience across a range of qualifications. We don't believe you can just attach credits to units as a simple exercise in a short timeframe. It's a developmental process using experience, communication and feedback and we should treat the assigning of credit as a developmental process.*  
(ASET)

- In addition to applying the lesson learned to new qualifications awarding bodies will be faced with the need to develop and roll out systems and processes for assigning in an efficient and sustainable way. There was recognition amongst project participants that if credit is to be the basis of qualifications for the future then it will be integral to all awarding body processes and systems. Ensuring a sustainable way of doing this was being actively considered by awarding bodies in the project.

*Not sure yet... whether ultimately we will be able to use fewer people in the design/assigning process... I am not yet convinced of the most efficient method of quality assuring our decisions.* (City & Guilds)

*We plan to formalise the process. Proposals have gone to OCR's Credit Steering Group and the intention now is to embed credit into our existing systems and processes rather than having separate processes for credit.*  
(OCR)

*This approach kept the process cost-effective and efficient and it needs to be - when we roll the process out across our whole portfolio.* (NCFE)



## Section 5. Some Challenging Issues

This section pays specific attention to three particularly challenging issues that arose in the project, APL in a credit system, the application of credit to General Qualifications (GCSEs and GCEs), and grading of credit achievements. In the case of GQs and grading some work has been done, but at the time of writing, there were significant issues and no agreed position among project participants. In the case of APL, we felt it was necessary to clarify the relationship between APL, credit transfer and credit exemption and the role these might play in a credit system. Project participants and FAB made it clear that they would welcome some analysis of these three issues.

### Section 5.1 Accreditation of Prior Learning in a credit system

The development of a unified system of credit-based awards has significant implications for our understanding and practice regarding Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL). Terms such as APL, credit transfer and exemption were used in different contexts by many of the project participants and emerged repeatedly throughout the research evidence. However there was not a consistent and shared understanding of exactly what these terms meant in the context of a credit system. We have referred to all these terms in other sections of the report and the short definitions and descriptions which follow explain our use of the terms.

In addition the project participants recognised the importance of reaching this shared understanding and asked that further explanation and guidance be provided through the analysis. This section aims to contribute to reaching that understanding and will be expanded in the Guidance Document<sup>5</sup>.

Firstly it is important to note that we are describing **accrediting** prior learning. To accredit means to give official recognition or to certify as meeting required standards. In the context of a credit system this means the award of credit. The distinction between Accreditation of Prior Learning and Assessment of Prior Learning will be made later.

The introduction of a credit system also provides opportunities for credit transfer and credit exemption which both differ from, but can be related to APL. A definition of APL is offered below together with further explanation on the use and application of all three terms.

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<sup>5</sup> *Learning from experience – implementing credit in the CQFW - A Good Practice Guide for Awarding Bodies 2006*

**Accreditation of Prior Learning: The award of credit based on verifiable evidence of the achievement of a unit or units gained through prior learning.**

As in all award of credit, the award is made for designated outcomes at a particular level. The nature of the evidence (and any assessment which produced the evidence) would need to match any specifications set by the awarding body or other responsible body. The more flexibility that exists in assessment arrangements and the more achievements are specified in units in the framework, the greater the opportunities for APL. APL is not offered for already certificated learning achievements as this would lead to the same achievements being accredited more than once. (It should be noted however that Certificates of Attendance do not constitute certified achievement.)

Given that units identify learning achievements rather than the contexts or methods of learning then the nature of the prior learning (e.g. whether formally taught, experiential or work based) should be immaterial. It is possible however that other requirements linked to the units result in the evidence being insufficient to lead to the award of credit. In this instance **assessment of prior learning** may be required. Assessment of prior learning may be necessary where a particular assessment method or evidence is specified, or where the evidence is out of date, unreliable, or just not available; for example where prior learning was experiential, a long time ago or very informal. In such cases assessment will be needed in line with any requirements in order to supply evidence of unit achievement. However in the overall context of a credit system, where credit is awarded for verified achievement, it is not essential to distinguish between APL and APEL.

**Credit Exemption** is claimed for already certificated achievement. It offers the opportunity for learners to have certificated achievement which is not credit based count towards the achievement of credit based qualifications. The more flexible the rules in allowing exemptions (within and across awarding bodies) then the greater the opportunities for all achievements to count (and hence to support progression) towards whole qualifications.

**Credit Transfer** allows learners to transfer credits achieved for one qualification towards the achievement of a different qualification. The more flexible the rules of combination for achievement of a qualification the greater the opportunities for credit transfer to support whole qualification achievement.

Taken together APL, exemption, and transfer are all devices which can support greater recognition of achievement, progression and accumulation of achievements towards whole qualifications. The rules of combination and other requirements specified (such as assessment) will determine how usable these devices are to individual learners. However if arrangements for APL are established within the overall system of credit then the facility

to claim credit on this basis should be part of the offer made to learners. If exemption and transfer are enabled and supported across, as well as within awarding bodies then opportunities for people to build achievements towards qualifications from different learning episodes in different contexts can be greatly enhanced.

## **Section 5.2 General Qualifications**

Three awarding bodies in the project offer and award General Qualifications (GQs) which are for the purposes of this report, GCSEs and GCEs offered to learners by participating awarding bodies in Wales. This section examines what awarding bodies discovered and the obstacles they found in introducing credit to GQs; and some suggested ways forward.

### **Obstacles to applying credit to GQs**

The difficulty in applying credit to GQs in Wales principally lies in the apparent incompatibility between systems for measuring achievement used for vocational and academic qualifications, and current government specifications for GQs, alongside an uncertain position for the future of GQs in England – the principal market for GQs in the UK due to the size of its population. For awarding bodies in the project to seriously tackle credit and GQs, the question was (after wholesale reform of GQs was postponed in the 14-19 white paper for England) whether it was the right time to invest significant effort and resources.

*We have been hanging on so long to find out what's happening with [the reform of] GCSE/GCEs – 90% of our business is in this area – and in practice we can't afford to experiment here, given the anticipated demands from a range of reforms to these qualifications expected fairly shortly. WJEC staff are involved in all sides of the business here from development to operations which means that we need to be clear about practical applications before we can commit staffing... Providing and developing a range of educational services in Wales is a central function for WJEC; however the business reality is that we offer GCSEs and GCEs in an open market and any changes to provision have to satisfy both regulators and customers across England and Wales.*  
(WJEC)

Notwithstanding these circumstances two awarding bodies in the project attempted to tackle the issues that arose from associating credit with GCSEs and GCEs. The third GQ awarding body in the project involved GQ staff in training sessions and discussions on assigning, assessment and QA of vocational qualifications. Their input was considered valuable. Given management structures which usually separate these staff in the large awarding body organisations, both VQ and GQ staff welcomed and said they benefited from input and ideas from their colleagues. However in this

case it became difficult to justify and sustain the involvement of GQ staff in the project, once the prospect of reform of GQs receded with the publication of the 14-19 (England) white paper in early 2005. Overall, GQ staff involved in the project had less history or knowledge of credit than their VQ colleagues. They said the project 'started them thinking' and they found what they learned very valuable.

### **Systems and specifications**

WJEC made a useful early contribution on the differences in origin, culture and assessment practice between most GQs and VQs. The key difference was encapsulated in the perceived comparative effectiveness (and objectivity) claimed for two means of measuring achievement, with 'criterion-referencing' on one hand and 'marks-based assessment' on the other. There were however significant gains for those awarding bodies that brought together staff and other experts from the two traditions to address and solve problems that emerged in the project. In practice, we found that differences between these two systems, and differences in culture and professional history between GQ and VQ protagonists, were not as much an obstacle to progress as differences in current government specifications for GQs. All Awarding bodies in the project worked within current government specifications and regulations for the qualifications selected for the project. The success of their efforts was directly related to how much these specifications helped or hindered their work. The specifications for GQs were an obstacle, as the reader will see from what follows, when awarding bodies attempted to find workable solutions within the current GQ specifications. In this section we have focussed on some of these technical obstacles to applying credit to GQs and suggested some ways of overcoming them.

It would be fair to say that the attempts to assign credit to GQs will appear from our report to raise more questions than answers. This aspect of the project helped to identify questions, many of which had not been fully considered before. At the time of writing, WJEC was renegotiating the timescale for completion of project tasks. They were able to raise what they believed would be the major issues for them in achieving their objectives in relation to credit and GQs and we have considered those issues in our analysis.

### **Technical issues in applying credit to GQs**

The work of the three GQ awarding bodies on GCSEs helped to shape and inform the analysis in this section.

#### **GCSEs**

**Level** - We have illustrated some of the difficulties in applying credit (using the current GQ specifications) by telling the story of one awarding body exercise with a specific GCSE. This qualification was composed of three units, two achieved by assessment of evidence from coursework,



internally marked/externally moderated, and a third unit achieved through examination. GCSEs in England and Wales are designed to notionally cover both level 1 (grades D to G) and level 2 (grades A\* to C). This does not match the CQFW's expectations that a unit is only ever at one level in the Framework.

The awarding body working on this GCSE felt that as a result of the 'coursework' units notionally spanning two levels, it would be best to unpick them to create two sub-units and then map the Assessment Criteria they had identified against the NICATS Level Descriptors.

The awarding body identified a number of problems associated with this approach. GQ awarding bodies do not currently award below unit level - meaning that radical revisions to the specification and awarding structures would be necessary in order to award credit in this way. If only one unit could be awarded, there was a question about what level of achievement would be shown on a candidate's certificate if they achieved such a unit - both level one and two, or just level two? In addition, new pass marks would have to be devised at both levels of the sub-units. These would be different to the existing grade boundary marks and would therefore complicate the awarding process greatly.

An alternative solution was for credit to be awarded to candidates which reflected learning time assigned for the unit and level awarded dependent upon the grade the candidate achieved. Achievement at Grades A\*-C would result in an award of credit at level two, whereas achievement at grades D-G would result in the award of credit at level one. This resolution itself, however, also presented challenges. Though not explicitly stated in the CQFW CCA, it was accepted by awarding bodies and others in the project, that a unit would only be assigned one level. This is a basic rule in functioning credit frameworks, that units are composed of learning outcomes, assessment criteria, a level and have a credit value. This means that issuing credit for units at more than one level would require a revision of this basic principle. Note also that credit values cannot be assigned to a *collection* of units (whether they are at the same level or not).

The awarding body went on to test out theoretically, what would happen if they 'unpicked' the third, examined unit - i.e. what would happen if two 'sub-units' were devised at levels one and two. In addition to the issues identified above, they came across complex difficulties in relation to constructing a single examination paper to reflect these changes. They found it would need to be written to ensure that level one questions only contained the level one content highlighted in the revised specification and that the same method would have to be adopted for examining at level two. This raised the question of whether all level one questions would need to be completed accurately in order for the award of credit. If not,

the percentage of the questions that must be completed accurately would need to be defined. Furthermore, if one level one question was not achieved, would a candidate fail the credit unit? What if they had managed to answer some level two questions accurately? This theoretical exercise raised some very important questions for GQs and credit. There are, as discussed in Section 8 Assessment, issues to be addressed in associating credit based units with examinations, and we now know that these are further complicated in the case of GCSEs which span two levels in the CQFW.

### **GCE**

One awarding body assigning credit values to a GCE found the exercise less problematic because GCEs are notionally viewed as sitting at one level. There was a debate about whether or not learners' progression from AS to A2 should be taken into account when assigning credit values and if so, would that affect the relative credit level of the Units at AS and A2?

### **Relative size of GQ units and GQ whole qualifications**

In assigning credit to units in the GCSE in question different credit values were assigned to each of the units. Credit values are a measurement of volume and not level. However this may become an issue for GCSEs where individual units are tacitly accepted as having the same value (though teachers may recognise that some units take longer to achieve than others). In addition, what might the public reaction be to credit volumes (in one or more subject area) at level one being greater than at level two?

The project did not produce evidence that different GQs might be assigned different credit values, though this would clearly be a likely logical outcome of further development of credit based GQs. These implications need full consideration before implementation and use of GQs in the market, and substantiates the awarding body case for more careful work on the development of credit based GQs before moving to awarding, whatever the political imperative. What may be tacitly accepted now in practice, that there is a difference in size (and perhaps level of difficulty) among GQs (of the same type and ostensibly at the same level) would be made explicit and public by the application of credit to GQs as they stand.

### **Other issues (raised by and discussed with awarding bodies but not yet addressed in practice) included:**

- Should/could the practice of 'compensation' be extended to achievement of GQs?
- Is there a clear relationship between the level of Entry level qualifications and lower grade GCSEs?

- A demand for reporting at unit/paper and/or subject level and timing of this will have an impact on awarding arrangement for GQ awarding bodies
- The development of a standard credit volume for short/single/double awards
- Impact on assessment practice - assigning level and volume for tiered assessment (subjects involved in project follow most common GCSE model: i.e. tiered paper and untiered coursework)

### **A way forward for credit based GQs?**

The tension between the adhering to the CQFW CCA credit principles and applying design specifications for GQs was articulated by each GQ awarding body in the project. Awarding bodies could see the potential benefits of designing credit based GQs (though this does not mean that all wished to abandon the existing GQ specifications or traditions). Through testing the CCA credit principles through the project they were however able to identify what would need to change to enable the design of credit based GQs:

- There is a danger that *credit-rating* existing GQs (using the model of 'equivalencing' tried in the early stages of the CQFW) is again put forward as a solution to the issues raised. As considerable progress has been made among awarding bodies on developing their capacity to use credit in designing qualifications, and that such *credit-rated* qualifications would not articulate with other credit based units and qualifications in the framework, there is little to be gained from pursuing that route, especially if new approaches to designing credit GQs are developed and tested.
- If credit is to be fully implemented then all unitary awarding bodies will need to think through the design processes required. An individual awarding body cannot "go it alone" in designing credit based GQs. This will need to be done collaboratively by awarding bodies and across the relevant UK countries. Awarding bodies need to know from the authorities how and by whom this will be initiated.
- Current units in the GCSE discussed would have to be redesigned to recognise achievement at separate levels. Credit based units cannot include outcomes and criteria at more than one level.
- Some GQ Awarding body staff in the project began to think about designing GQs in this way. They recognised opportunities – to offer learners the opportunity to achieve units at level 3 or 4 within a level 2 or 3 award. There is considerable scope for rewarding achievement at unit level – which may be seen as an attractive option to schools and colleges.

- We have suggested in Section 8 that examinations can be associated as a method of assessment with credit based units, retaining the philosophy behind marks-based assessment and holding to credit principles. This is a major step and could be taken forward by the GQ awarding bodies alongside those VQ awarding bodies which use examination as a method of assessing achievement.
- To award credit an awarding body has to be satisfied that the learner has achieved all the outcomes in a given unit. The mark or grade criteria associated with the assessment task(s) designed to show the learner has met assessment criteria could be the threshold or pass mark boundary. Grading could be used to distinguish further between candidates achievements (at the level of the unit).
- It appeared from the GCSE case study discussed that the current grade boundaries differentiated (effectively) between candidates achieving at levels 1 and 2. They of course go further and distinguish between achievements within levels 1 and 2 and the application of such grade boundaries could be tested in devising individual credit based units for selected GQs.
- Bringing qualifications of different types (ones that have traditionally stayed apart) into a credit framework may mean that the content, design of course materials and coursework, assessment requirements and range of possible achievements may also need to change to ensure proper articulation between units as well as qualifications.
- There is a need to explore how credit based units can be used to recognise the core elements of the WBQ.
- Could some common units be developed for GQs that could be shared across awarding bodies?

### **5.3 Grading credit achievement**

It is worth noting that there is little or no historical experience of grading (criterion referenced) credit achievements – this is largely new territory. Awarding bodies in the project brought their expertise in grading to the issue and potential solutions were identified. We found that it was possible to devise a system for grading credit achievements and that the four point system of grading achievement could be adapted to work with credit based units and qualifications. Some of the issues that emerged concerning grading were actually features of examination based assessment rather than grading per se. We have looked at examinations

and credit in Section 8 and the particular challenges of designing credit based GQs in Section 5.2.

One awarding body in the project that had assigned credit to units, associated (published) grade criteria with credit achievement and planned to award credit on this basis. Their view was that the four point system of grading credit achievement (fail, pass, merit and distinction) worked successfully. They found that there was a need for careful distinction between grade boundaries, particularly at level 2 but that this was a 'solvable' issue.

One specific session for awarding bodies on grading credit achievement was held in June 2005; this section is informed by the Credit Works presentation on grading and the discussion with awarding bodies and other stakeholders which followed. Interviewees raised questions and discussed grading with Credit Works and in two cases detailed email discussions were conducted over several months. Again, the points made below are informed by these detailed discussions.

Thinking about how to grade credit achievement was not seen to be a relevant exercise by all awarding bodies in the project, as some did not grade achievement and appeared to have no future plans to do so. Traditionally, grading of achievement is common practice in the assessment of acquired knowledge. Assessment of skills achievement is rooted in the concept of competence measurement. 'Competence' is achieved by reaching a threshold of ability to use a particular skill and once reached and demonstrated, competence is achieved; grading of achievement of competence is not common practice. The CQFW makes no reference to grading and as such offers no advice on grading credit achievement. However awarding bodies say that they will continue to grade achievement, principally to:

- Help HE distinguish between candidates for entry
- Aggregate overall achievement
- Meet customer demand for recognition of higher achievement
- Rate qualification achievements for UCAS, and performance tables/indicators

### **Are there particular issues in grading credit achievement?**

As in other areas of implementation of the CQFW, VQs and GQs will present different challenges to attempts to grade credit achievement. The relationship between qualification choice for the project and the ease or otherwise with which awarding bodies assigned credit carried through to grading, and followed a similar pattern of ease or difficulty.

Difficulty with grading credit achievements will have to be addressed if credit based GQs are designed – there will be no choice for awarding bodies but to grade GQ credit achievements. But GQs vary in their design

and structure and it was clear from the project that some GQs were more conducive to the application of credit than others. Awarding bodies suggested that the traditional subject (knowledge based) syllabus presented a different set of challenges to the 'vocational' GCSE which assesses development of skills and the application of knowledge in a context.

Grading credit achievements was and is new practice – and it will be important for awarding bodies and providers to keep focussed on these credit principles when writing grade criteria and applying these criteria in practice.

### **Grading credit –applying the principles in practice...**

- *All the learning outcomes must be achieved for credit to be awarded* – irrespective of the grade associated with that achievement.
- *Credit is only assigned for the learning outcomes specified in that unit* –higher grade criteria should not be additional learning outcomes.
- *Only a single credit value can be associated with a given unit* - achievement of a higher grade does not mean that more credit can be awarded for the achievement of that unit.
- *All pass criteria devised for achievement of a unit must meet all learning outcomes adequately*
- *Dealing with additional grading demands* - higher grade criteria must still be at the level of the unit, and not above it.

### **One grading scale for all achievements?**

Can a single system of grading be applied to all achievements in the CQFW? There are three models of reporting and grading achievement commonly in use in the current qualifications system:

2 point scale – fail, pass

4 point scale – fail, pass, merit, distinction

8 point scale – graded achievements in GCSEs and GCEs

All three scales were either used or tested in the project. The 2 point scale has been commonly used to report most criterion referenced credit achievements. The four point scale is used in Edexcel BTEC and OCR National qualifications and we found, could be applied to credit based units in these qualifications. The 8 point scale is used in GCSEs and GCEs, and in GCSEs spans two levels. We have made some specific points on GCSEs and this form of grading in Section 5.2. The application of the

principles outlined above for grading credit achievements to GCEs using an eight point scale, (where all achievements are nominally at the same level) may become more difficult the larger the number of grades applied. Can the awarding body be sure that A\* grade criteria are set at level 3 and not at level 4? Application of the four point scale to GQs would require a major common policy shift in Wales and England, and appeared to GQ awarding bodies to be unlikely at present.

### **Do we grade achievement at unit, cluster of units, or qualification level?**

Awarding bodies in the project suggested in discussion that their current practice of grading of achievement was driven by market demand. They reported that there would be a continued demand for grading at unit, component/module, and qualification level. We found there was no technical obstacle to grading credit achievements other than those rehearsed and referenced in this report. Grading of units as well as components/modules might complicate articulation of credit achievements and impede credit transfer, but demand for grading of achievement will continue from providers, HE, employers and (therefore) learners. We do not know however what the impact of *unit* achievement and certification will have on the demand for graded *qualifications* or components of them.

### **Grading credit – an issue that won't go away...**

There are unanswered questions concerning the impact of grading on the operation of the CQFW. This is not a speculative report, but at our discussion with awarding bodies we raised and discussed these questions:

- What will happen when units of NVQs feature in graded diplomas – the Welsh Bac for example?
- How will graded GQ credit achievements and ungraded vocational credit achievements be compared in assessing the performance of under 19s and their associated providers?
- How will the 'mix' of graded GQ and ungraded VQ units affect calculations for entry to HE?

Each of these questions supposes a continued mix of graded and ungraded achievements in the CQFW. Credit accumulation and transfer are undoubtedly complicated by the additional discriminating factor of grades.

### **Grading credit achievements – thinking ahead**

Should awarding bodies collaborate on standardising grading systems, in the absence of a fixed position from the regulator? Awarding bodies said that there was much value in involving both GQ and VQ staff with different expertise and approaches to assessing (and grading) achievement. It was

clear that graded credit achievements would affect all recognised bodies contributing to and using the CQFW – if mutual recognition of achievement is to work. Thus it was felt that awarding bodies which did not grade achievement would also have an interest in discussing the standardisation of grading systems for the CQFW.

### **Will the demand for grading change with the introduction of credit?**

A final thought that emerged from discussion on grading credit achievements in the CQFW: will the demand for grading change with the introduction of credit? If the CQFW recognises achievements at all levels, would learners opt for credit for higher achievements that could count and be transferred to other qualifications? For example, would a candidate pursue achievement of a level 4 unit in a given GCE subject (rather than an A\* at level 3) if achievement of that level 4 unit led to credit exemption from a higher level qualification? How would achievement of such a level 4 unit be viewed by an HEI considering a candidate for entry or an employer recruiting an 'A level' trainee?



## **Section 6. Capacity Building And Staff Development**

### **1. Summary**

This section examines how the awarding bodies involved used this project to support capacity building. The project has been learning by doing so participants gained the understanding, experience and skills to apply and operate credit and also to expose some of the issues and questions and begin to model solutions. They were all positive about this.

The project itself was a mutual learning process based on real practice. It enabled awarding bodies and other key stakeholders to come together and share their understanding of issues and explore these. This was recognised as beneficial and mutually supportive BUT did raise issues around commercial interests and competition.

Explicit staff development and training was also a key part of capacity building. We have analysed the common characteristics of this.

### **2. Building Credit Sense**

For FAB and for the awarding bodies involved, a major aim of this project was the development of experience and expertise in credit in awarding bodies. From the outset FAB was aware of the critical role of awarding bodies to the successful operation of the CQFW, and of the need to spread understanding and expertise amongst as many FAB members as possible.

*Our real interest was in spreading the expertise gained by those directly involved in the project across as many FAB awarding bodies operating in Wales as possible. And to be honest to make the CQFW happen – as awarding bodies are clearly central to its success. (FAB)*

There was mutual interest between awarding bodies and the CQFW partners in the successful development of this credit sense. If, as in Wales, the CQFW is to be the basis of the future system, and if it is to provide the mechanism for more flexible and responsive learning and achievement, then awarding bodies need to understand it and its implications for their products and organisation. Taking part in the project provided an early opportunity to build this understanding. For their part all CQFW partners recognised the importance of the awarding bodies to making the framework work in practice. They also recognised that its implementation would have implications for their own practice and capacity.

*Although a major outcome of this first phase has been the assignment of provisional credit values to existing qualifications, its main purpose has been to develop expertise in credit with key OCR staff. (First Interim Report OCR)*

*Another aim was to build credit awareness in the organisation and use the opportunity to do some internal capacity building in City & Guilds. (City & Guilds)*

*We need to review staffing in terms of how CQFW runs, is managed, administered, monitored and supported. It will need to be integral to everything....*

*Everyone needs to know about credit. (ACCAC)*

### **3. Learning by Doing**

The project was conceived and designed to be practice based. The awarding bodies and all the other partners would learn about credit by using it in practice. They would do this both individually and collectively, building credit sense in individual staff and organisations and sharing and comparing the experience across project participants.

Staff at all levels and in a variety of roles were engaged in project activity and the project's approach meant that they were working on real products. It was clear from the evidence that all learned significantly from this process and not only about the specific issues relating to the qualifications chosen.

*The project has increased the profile of credit in NCFE – we now have real examples of how credit will impact on NCFE. Reviewing existing units and qualifications has led to us think differently - changing the way we look at all our qualifications. (NCFE)*

*We got people at all different levels involved and thinking about it. It's been very good to learn from doing and the Professional Officers and others have gone away with expertise so we now have people ready for reform. (OCR)*

The experience enabled the awarding bodies to consider the strategic implications for the organisation, its products, services and systems. It enabled them to plan and initiate management of change in the organisation.

*This project is about preparing for the future – making our products in all areas of our portfolio more flexible – we want to use this experience to help us think and plan ahead. (NCFE)*

Even where certain staff roles and functions were not involved in project activity the experience drew out the implications for these staff.

*There's a lot of lessons to pass on to those writing syllabus and assessment for units. They need a clear understanding of the learning outcomes and how they can be demonstrated to meet the assessment criteria (CACHE)*

There was clear evidence that the project experience built understanding of the basic principles and skills and confidence in specific processes such as assigning. This appears to be the case across all the awarding bodies participating.

*All staff involved in the project have indicated that they now have a good understanding of the basic principles of credit. They proved able to debate issues and technical points with expertise and are confident when discussing the uses and purpose of credit. It is evident that staff in Vocational Assessment have a good grounding in credit (OCR First Interim Report)*

In addition, the practice based approach supported cultural change in some of the awarding bodies. It appears that such cultural shifts would be less easy to achieve by theoretical discussions and exploration of how the credit system might work in practice.

*This is a different way of working and was a challenge. For example there was criticism of the NICATS level descriptors at first and many suggested they did not apply to their sector (or had not been developed with knowledge of their sector). Now there is an understanding that the NICATS level descriptors are there to be used to guide us in the process of levelling achievements, not simply followed as a set of instructions. (EDEXCEL)*

In the process of assigning in particular, the awarding bodies were testing out their existing models and approaches, amended and adapted as necessary to work with credit. Applying these in practice to real qualifications meant that key issues were identified, thoroughly explored and understood in practice, and that possible solutions could begin to be developed.

*There are issues on the GQ side but the process itself was useful in generating lessons and starting us thinking. The GQ staff involved had less history or knowledge of credit and it really started them thinking and they found it very valuable. (OCR)*

All of the key issues raised in the project (for example, mutual recognition of units or the development of quality principles for the CQFW) have been explored and discuss collectively. In the case of GQs (of direct concern to three of the awarding bodies in the project) collective discussion took place, to help identification of common solutions. Any commonly agreed solutions reached through the project are likely to be at the level of principle, but they will have been based on a clear and common understanding of how such principles affect practice.

#### **4. Mutual Learning: Sharing Experience and Practice**

At the highest level, all project participants worked collaboratively to learn together how the CQFW could work in practice. They were able to share understanding, analyse experience and work collectively to identify and address the issues in introducing such major reform. This collaborative and collective approach to developing credit sense and capacity provided both opportunities and challenges to the project partners. Appendix 3 details FAB organised events that supported the project and disseminated ongoing lessons from practice. The project itself emerged from (and was underpinned by) the development of the Credit Common Accord Forum for the CQFW, where awarding bodies were strongly represented.

*If awarding bodies work with the regulator to develop the regulatory framework... we have a critical mass now involved through the CQFW project... we have built the CQFW together so we have to make it work together, build it together so we can operate it together. (FAB)*

The challenges of taking this radically different approach to reform, one based on mutual learning and trust, are explored elsewhere in this report. This section will now examine how the awarding bodies were able to share experience and learning and the opportunities and tensions inherent in this.

The project revealed many examples of awarding bodies working collaboratively and/or sharing experience in addition to the meetings and activities which had been structured into the design of the project.

In the Second Wave group it was agreed that two additional awarding bodies would shadow the experience of those participating. This proved to be beneficial to both the "shadower" and the body being shadowed.

Whilst there were not sufficient resources in the project to support all the awarding bodies who wanted to participate in the Second Wave, those shadowing were able to gain a fuller understanding of credit in practice by observing at close hand the experience of those involved. They were able to not only observe but also to engage in discussion about real life practice and issues around assigning credit to specific qualifications. This enabled them to build their understanding and think through implications for their own organisation and practice.

Those being shadowed had the benefit of an expert but objective eye able to look in some detail at the process and outcomes of assigning credit. This led to useful and practical additional advice and support being available to participants.

*As part of Second Wave project Geoff Ford from SAS shadowed ASET. This proved really helpful as he was able to share thinking and ideas and*

*provide another "expert" view from an awarding body but there was no competition or conflict of interest between SAS and ASET. (ASET)*

The evidence indicates that shadowing can provide an effective and cost efficient tool for capacity building.

In addition to more systematic shadowing some awarding bodies were able to share their practice and experience of assigning. For example NCFE, a Second Wave group was able to discuss and share experience of assigning with Edexcel.

*We met with the Edexcel team working on the CQFW project – to talk through the processes we had used – exchanged understanding on methodology. We found that whether you used a huge panel or qualitative research you were likely to come to similar conclusions on credit size. It was very useful to talk to another awarding body which was further down the road of development. (NCFE)*

It was clear that in addition to strengthening the experience and confidence of the participants, this sharing of practice also played a key role in building mutual trust and understanding across awarding bodies. The importance of this for the future of the CQFW has been raised elsewhere in the report but it is worth emphasising here the value of mutual learning in developing shared understanding of the credit principles and their application, and hence mutual trust in operation of the system.

*Now we have built trust between us it is time for collaboration to share practice and test our understanding against other awarding bodies in the project... Develop mutual understanding and build mutual confidence in each other's processes. (EDEXCEL)*

Inevitably collaboration and sharing practice raised issues about competition between awarding bodies. FAB and all the awarding bodies involved were conscious of the tension between collaboration and competition.

*Vocational awarding bodies experience of the [introduction of] the NQF was traumatic - the imposition of external assessment [with little real detail on requirements] had a direct impact on our businesses. But of course we were and are in a competitive market. If one AB managed to come up with a way through the regulations that worked this was not shared – because it could have given that awarding body a competitive advantage – so inevitably such solutions are not shared (FAB)*

ASET and SAS were able to work together because they were not in competition and there was therefore no perceived conflict of interest.

Where there was potential competition between awarding bodies there were indications of wariness or reluctance to give too much away.

*We hoped people would have – in the meetings - shared more of the actual material they were working on though. This is maybe a symptom of being in competition as awarding bodies. (NCFE)*

It was clear from the evidence that models of sharing practice which did not create tensions around competition were possible and these models could be extended. Equally clear was that awarding bodies were willing to share when they perceived this to be in their business interests. At the time of writing, where they will draw the line on this collaboration has not been explicitly and collectively explored and identified.

## **5. Provision of Staff Development and Training**

All the awarding bodies in the project had engaged in credit discussions and/or developments prior to their engagement with project, either through CCAF or FAB events/groups.

The project itself provided numerous structured events and activities to share experience and support capacity building all of which were generally well supported. (See Appendix 3 for more details). These included:

- FAB seminars for members not participating in the project to learn from the experience
- Workshops at the annual FAB conferences in 2004 and 2005, open to all delegates
- CQFW project implementation meetings for participants explicitly structured to allow sharing and discussion of experience and issues
- Workshops for Second Wave awarding bodies
- Publication and dissemination of 2 Interim Project Reports
- Information and reports posted on FAB and Credit Works websites
- Agenda items on FAB Framework and Credit Group open to all FAB members to attend.

The demand from awarding bodies for activities and events to support capacity building was notable. Those participating generally took every opportunity to become better informed, attending the numerous CQFW and FAB meetings plus QCA events around the emerging FfA, in addition to internal development work and training.

*We have also made good use of recent QCA seminars on specific issues relating to the FfA, as well as initial QCA seminars on the broader FfA consultation, in order to get as many people involved as possible. (City & Guilds)*

*We have attended every QCA workshop on the FfA to date. (NCFE)*

Participation in these activities was clearly intended to enable engagement and understanding in order to influence change internally and externally.

*The CQFW has helped Edexcel understand the principles of credit and enabled us to comment confidently on other emerging frameworks. (EDEXCEL)*

The awarding bodies all deployed key staff who became credit “experts” internally and who were then used to build capacity and support change. These staff had usually developed their expertise through the activities described above. They were used to provide specific training for others and/or to work alongside others in the process of assigning.

*I would begin with a very short training programme – about 1 ½ hours with consultants who were to be involved in the assigning process (City & Guilds)*

*In summary, the process included two briefing events for staff with input from colleagues with a background and experience in credit. (OCR Second Interim Report)*

In addition many of the awarding bodies used external consultants to raise awareness and spread understanding of the principles and implications for practice more widely in the organisation. The use of external consultants by awarding bodies also supported change management, especially cultural change, in some organisations.

*People in NCFE used the experience and learned from it – and the wider team found the Credit Works presentation and training day very helpful. (NCFE)*

*Credit Works provided training that was open to all – then we honed in on those staff who were to be directly involved (EDEXCEL)*

Ultimately though, the awarding bodies wanted to develop a sense of ownership. By developing credit sense and then applying this sense to their own products and services, they began to build credit into their own approaches to qualifications, so that its longer term strategic implications and benefits could be realised.

*The NICATS handbook, Common Accord Document and Credit Works workshops were all useful at that stage - getting us started. We developed our own Edexcel approach from there. (EDEXCEL)*

All the participants drew extensively on the guidance documents supplied to support their internal staff development.

*We used the Credit Common Accord guidance and the whole host of Credit Works material! (NCFE)*

Many however developed their own guidance documents, taking CQFW and the CCA and contextualising for their own qualifications, processes and systems for assigning. These became key resource for staff development and support.

*We took the existing CCAF documents and developed our own guidance for OCR external staff...The guidance document we used was useful. It was widely valued by those involved. (OCR)*

All involved in the project are aware of the importance of building capacity across their organisations. They have developed or are developing training and development plans to address this.

*In addition we will devise a training plan to be completed in October 05 for future roll-out and communication across the organisation. Everyone found the training useful and we believe it's helped build credit sense across the organisation. (OCR)*



## 7. External Relations

### 1. Summary

Awarding body liaison with external organisations in the project varied and was determined by the nature of the project tasks themselves – i.e. whom they had to (or wanted to) liaise with to achieve their project objectives. This section describes the experience, benefits and issues arising from relationships with external organisations during the project; the benefits of collaboration; liaison with the regulator(s) and SSCs, inter awarding body liaison; how these relationships worked in practice, and how liaison with external organisations worked during the process of assigning credit to existing (and in one case, new) awarding body qualification(s).

### CQFW

The CQFW team was responsible for coordinating meetings between project partners and collecting and disseminating progress reports. The CQFW team strongly believed that collaboration and partnership were instrumental in driving the project and identified the following benefits:

- **Successful partnerships and collaboration have driven the CQFW forward from the start** – the CQFW partnership predated the inception of the ESF project. The development of the Credit Common Accord in 2000-2001 set the scene and tone for the development of the CQFW. A level of trust had been established between all members of the CCA Forum and this trust continued to evolve throughout the lifetime of the ESF project
- **A Tripartite partnership between ELWA ACCAC and HEFQW backed by the WAG** – These key partners are and will be ultimately responsible for the management of the CQFW. Awarding bodies will continue to exert their influence through FAB, likely to be more effective if the organisations with authority over the CQFW are able to continue the collaborative approach they established between them through the project.
- **Collaboration on principles and implementation driven by awarding bodies** – individual awarding bodies and FAB have had a direct influence and have helped shape the CQFW.
- **Buy-in and engagement from these bodies as a result** – awarding bodies and others involved now have a genuine stake in the CQFW, are effectively co-owners of the framework and a mutual interest in seeing it function successfully.
- **ACCAC has played an active role as a partner in the project** and had to straddle two roles – continue to meet its legislative obligations to the NQF alongside QCA and CCEA, and engage in the development of practice through experience of the CQFW as it evolved through the project.

## **Federation of Awarding Bodies**

FAB conducted the project which involved significant external liaison with its members – principally through the organisation of seminars for awarding bodies not directly involved in the project; regular meetings of the FAB Framework and Credit Group featuring the FAB CQFW project as a standard agenda item; FAB workshops and seminars for awarding bodies on specific topics arising from the project; workshops at FAB national annual conference. In addition, attendance at ESF implementation group meetings; membership of and attendance at meetings of the Credit Common Accord Forum; membership of and attendance at the CQFW Policy Forum.<sup>6</sup>

Individual project partners' experience of external liaison can be summarised as follows:

## **Sector Skills Councils**

Awarding body contact with SSCs for the purposes of the project was limited due to the evolving status of these new bodies:

*Edexcel worked with one SSC that was relevant to the pilot – SEMTA. We would have involved more SSCs if it had been possible. In general SSCs need to be involved to build their understanding of designing credit based units and there is mutual benefit for awarding bodies and SSCs to develop a collaborative common understanding of credit. Credit may be instrumental to sector qualification strategies and development of NOS... (EDEXCEL)*

Awarding bodies had little contact with SSCs in assigning credit to their qualifications, for the following reasons, among others:

- In some cases the qualification was not (yet) relevant to a particular SSC (NCFE)
- The SSC had not viewed the changes proposed and made as requiring their detailed approval and was happy to agree to the proposal in broad terms and the awarding body relationship with the SSC in question is historically positive and current (WAMITAB)
- SSC interest was related to content and NOS, not the structure of the qualification – especially where the structure proposed retained many of the design features present in existing NQF qualifications – for example the knowledge content remained unaltered and the assessment method was consistent with other SSC approved qualifications (AMSPAR)
- The awarding body chose qualification(s) for the project that required little or no detailed SSC involvement. This was done deliberately to keep the process simple or achievable, or because

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<sup>6</sup> See Appendix 3 for further details.

SSCs were still in their infancy (and not ready to process proposals) when the CQFW ESF project began.

Some awarding bodies were aware that SSCs and awarding bodies will need to collaborate much more closely on the application of credit in recognising achievement. SSCs will need to become engaged in qualification design – and this raises issues of how practicable it would be for one recognised body to assign (design and see approved) credit based units and another recognised body to award – without collaboration on the design of units and qualifications.

Awarding bodies considered that Credit ought to be instrumental to SSC Sector Qualifications Strategies - yet there was no consistent evidence from this project that credit has registered with SSCs in this way.

Of course one project participant, SEMTA, is an SSC – and like the awarding bodies in the project benefited from exposure to the implications of credit for its business. In its SQSs SEMTA has reflected the importance of credit for meeting demands for increased flexibility. However the project took SEMTA beyond this acceptance of the potential benefits of credit – they have had to deal with the consequences for implementation – which has potentially far reaching consequences for how they respond to employers needs and demands for recognition of achievements beyond sector occupational qualifications. For awarding bodies, SSCs with this level of awareness are more likely to be able to act as successful collaborators in unit and qualification design.

### **ACCAC and awarding bodies**

***Liaison with ACCAC on awarding body proposals*** – First Wave awarding bodies were all members of the CQFW Credit Common Accord Forum. A close working relationship with ACCAC was established between these awarding bodies and ACCAC – they had worked together on drafting the Common Accord and had a working knowledge and understanding of their relative positions on the CQFW.

*We have had close communication with all regulators throughout. ACCAC has been happy to help to keep bureaucracy low and controlled.*  
(City & Guilds)

*We're not awarding so we haven't had too much liaison with ACCAC though we've had various meetings and dialogue which has been helpful.*  
(OCR)

At early stages in the project it was not always easy to make rapid progress – the need to invoke the joint regulation process in the approval of qualifications/units for inclusion in the NQF (prior to inclusion in the

CQFW) did add delay and raised questions about regulator responses to proposals from the awarding bodies.

*The units were submitted as 'amendments' to existing qualifications to the Regulatory Authorities– this took time but Edexcel and ACCAC worked closely to ensure centres and learners were not subjected to lengthy delays.(EDEXCEL)*

The pace of processing submissions by the regulator(s) improved over the course of the project.

Each Second Wave awarding body followed a common process agreed with the regulator for submitting their proposals. In addition ACCAC asked Second Wave awarding bodies to complete relevant sections of *Assigning and Awarding Credit for Stage 1 Pilot, CQFW, Working Document, ACCAC June 2004*. On behalf of the second wave awarding bodies, FAB agreed with ACCAC that submissions for CQFW accreditation needed to be seen as work in progress. There was also a need for ACCAC to keep the demands of joint regulation in mind – a difficult task with the FfA in the process of being introduced in England and the NQF being phased out. It was agreed that it was helpful if both awarding bodies and ACCAC saw Second Wave awarding body submissions as relating solely to the qualifications to be covered by the ESF project. This allowed all involved to learn from experience and change processes and other elements as appropriate before they were applied across the awarding bodies) to other qualifications in the CQFW in due course.

*We had generally positive feedback on our proposal, but the process of being approved [as an awarding body for the CQFW] was unclear in places... I expect the regulations will catch up with practice... as part of this project. (NCFE)*

### **Inter awarding body liaison**

Awarding bodies are businesses, often in competition with each other, but on many occasions in the project they were happy to work together, collaborating on solving common problems where they judged it was in their mutual interest to do so.

*We intend to liaise with OCR, C&G and Edexcel on Key Skills values and if possible to exchange experience with OCR on General Qualification issues. (WJEC)*

Other Awarding bodies met to share understanding and experience. Passing on of expertise from First to Second Wave awarding bodies happened informally – there was no obligation on any awarding body to share their knowledge in this way.

*We met with the Edexcel team working on the CQFW project – to talk through the processes we had used – exchanged understanding on methodology. ... It was very useful to talk to another awarding body which was further down the road of development... (NCFE)*

And, beyond altruism, some recognised the need now and in the future for further collaboration to help to confirm the validity of each others processes, to move towards mutual trust of each others approach to assigning credit to units in qualifications, and build mutual confidence in the CQFW.

*I think we now need some cross awarding body work to look at how we each assigned credit. When the project was new we were all fairly cautious about the process and about how each of us [awarding body, SEMTA] would go about it. Now we have built trust between us it is time for collaboration to share practice and test our understanding against other awarding bodies in the project. Such collaboration would also help us come to a common understanding on Learning Time for example... develop mutual understanding and build mutual confidence in each other's processes. (EDEXCEL)*

## Section 8. Assessment

### 1. Summary

This section describes how awarding body choice of qualification related (partly) to the likely perceived impact on assessment and quality assurance practice - where the awarding body was in a position to choose from a variety of qualifications in its portfolio. This section also examines what impact if any, the awarding body choice of qualification had on approaches to assessment of achievement; and the relationship between credit and marks based assessment. Grading of achievement of credit based units is addressed in section 5.4 and the potential impact of credit on General Qualifications described and discussed in section 5.2.

### 2. Qualification choice and assessment practice

Three awarding bodies in the project were able to choose qualifications from their portfolios for the project that were (in their judgement) conducive to the application of credit. We have discussed these characteristics in section 4.

Awarding bodies chose (in the main) unitised VRQs with assessment requirements that they believed would function with little adjustment of assessment practice as units in a credit framework.

*...the qualifications chosen worked with credit – no synoptic assessment, and units could be used on a 'stand alone' basis or integrated for delivery. (EDEXCEL)*

Awarding bodies looked for qualifications where the component units were:

- *Units of assessment rather than units of content* – where learning outcomes and assessment criteria were identifiable within the units as they stood and ideally, where the units were fully integrated into programmes of delivery – i.e. not used as teaching units but as units of assessment.
- *stand alone units* – where each unit was at least capable of being separately assessed and awarded.

And awarding bodies avoided qualifications that depended on a synoptic assessment task – where unit achievement would be dependent on achievement of another unit or units in a component or module of the qualification.

*We were in the process of removing the external assessment component from the qualification anyway – so this scope to remove it was convenient*

*for us... removal of the (synoptic) external assessment component makes unit achievement and certification more straightforward – now when you get the four units you get the qualification.*  
(NCFE)

The two awarding bodies that made the (credit assigned) units available to centres for piloting purposes wanted to ensure that providers were able to continue their existing practice in teaching and assessment and integrate the revised units comfortably into their programmes. For example, if assessment of achievement across units was preferred by a provider for curriculum and delivery purposes, this approach was not discouraged, as long as the units to which credit was assigned were capable of being separately assessed and certificated.

No new assessment practice was introduced by any awarding body – and this was clearly intentional. Awarding body arrangements for assessment, standardisation of assessment decisions and verification of results were in themselves being tested to find what changes to practice might or might not need to be made in the short, medium and long term.

Two of the awarding bodies piloted use of the credit assigned units with providers during 2004 and 2005. At the time of writing no assessment issues were reported by these providers through their awarding body.

### **3. The potential impact of credit on current assessment practice**

Each of the awarding bodies that were able to select qualifications for the project was aware of some of the challenges to come in applying credit to other products in their portfolio. Some of these challenges were unavoidable for five awarding bodies in the project which respectively:

- awarded NVQs only
- assessed achievement of one mandatory unit in the qualification through examination.
- assessed all achievement of its qualification through one examination.
- awarded GCSEs and GCEs as part of its practice and decided to include 2 such qualifications in their project.
- awarded mainly (90%) GCSEs and GCEs.

Issues relating to assessment practice did not emerge in the case of the NVQ awarding body; their focus was on the assigning of credit to units in their qualifications, which up to now have been achieved as a whole and not through the accumulated achievement of units.

#### **4. Credit and marks based assessment**

The particular issues in applying credit to GQs are discussed in Section 5.2. However, we know the fundamental issue of applying marks based assessment to credit based units cuts across the qualification types represented in the project. Some awarding bodies in the project were keen to examine the issues in associating credit based units with marks based assessment, and the fruits of those discussions and other presented evidence are discussed here.

Almost all awarding bodies in the project used marks-based assessment with some qualifications in their portfolio.

*Yes we've introduced a test by e-assessment for unit 1 but this wasn't because of credit. There are lots of advantages like quick and specific responses based on the candidates test and speedy results and efficiency for the large numbers who take this unit.*  
(CACHE)

E-assessment is still commonly a version of multiple choice tests, and these will continue to have their place in any fit for purpose assessment strategy. The introduction of more complex e-assessment may be more amenable to the accumulation of evidence of achievement over time towards the award of credit, though this might be more accurately described as a systematised method for *collecting evidence* for assessment than actual assessment. Marks based assessment is likely to grow with the advent of e-assessment and the development of credit based units will have to take account of this.

#### **Different routes to achievement?**

The basic ingredients of credit based units are learning outcomes, assessment criteria, level and credit value. When all the specified achievements in a unit are achieved and verified a person can be awarded credit(s). In marks-based assessment (examinations or tests) achievement occurs when the examination taker (candidate) can demonstrate a proportion of the knowledge or skill being tested. In other words the candidate does not have to demonstrate that they have all the knowledge and skill being tested in the examination in order to achieve the (unit or qualification) outcome. At face value these two approaches to assessing achievement appear at odds with each other, but this is not necessarily the case.

#### **Can credit based units be designed to accommodate marks based assessment?**

We would argue that its is possible to design credit based units which include learning outcomes and assessment criteria that could use a test or examination to assess achievement of all or some of the outcomes in a



given unit. In such a case the learning outcomes and assessment criteria would need to be sufficiently precise for judgements concerning achievement to be made, but not so prescriptive that failure to achieve an outcome in a particular way precluded achievement.

Examinations are routinely changed and or recycled from item/question banks, usually over a stated period of time. Each examination paper will be different, but consistency of content is required to standardise the achievement of candidates over time. An analysis of one awarding body's examination papers in the project shows that questions focus consistently on three aspects of a curriculum:

- assessing the acquisition of a particular skill (in a variety of ways across all papers in the cycle)
- the acquisition of particular knowledge items (again assessed through a variety of different but consistent questions).
- The papers also test the acquisition of a further (variable) set of knowledge items to demonstrate wider application of the skill tested.

It would be possible therefore to write learning outcomes which described the skill to be assessed, and criteria which would be used to judge that the outcome had been met.

It would also be possible to write learning outcomes and assessment criteria to match the particular knowledge items.

The set of variable knowledge items could be assessed either in the context of application of the skill tested, or specific learning outcomes and assessment criteria written to exemplify acquisition of (some of) a wider set of knowledge items. The degree to which the candidate had been successful in achieving the learning outcomes in a unit could be reflected in grade criteria (additional to the information contained in the unit) which would be used for this purpose. Grading of achievement is discussed in Section 5.4.

### **Barriers to associating credit based units with marks based assessment**

It has to be said that the two cultures which gave rise to criterion and marks based assessment have different origins, and until recently, have followed different paths through the evolution of qualification development. These differences are often promoted and defended by the different protagonists of each method. Arguments are made for the fitness for purpose or the relative 'precision' or otherwise of the two methods of assessing achievement. These differences of view will present a further challenge to mutual recognition of credit achievements. We have explored this potential barrier in Section 10.2

## **Section 9. Quality Assurance**

### **1. Summary**

In this section we look at the role of professional external awarding body QA staff – moderators, external verifiers, and examiners and discuss the positive impact their involvement in assigning credit might have on post approval/accreditation quality assurance; future issues for quality assurance where employers, learners and providers begin to construct programmes from units across traditional sector/subject divisions and what to expect of such QA staff in these circumstances; consequences for the regulator's accreditation process if/when providers and EVs/Moderators feedback requires changes to units in the CQFW. We also look to the future and discuss models of QA that may need to be developed for an efficient and effective CQFW, and some of the potential consequences for the regulator and awarding bodies. Awarding bodies, in the main, chose qualifications for the project that minimised the consequential impact on their assessment and quality assurance *systems*. The project shows that the arrival of the CQFW could have important consequences for awarding body (and regulator) QA practice.

### **2. Developments in QA practice**

There is little or no evidence that awarding body systems in quality assurance were changed as a result of the project. One awarding body spoke of 'tweaking' their current system to accommodate changes, and another recognised that once the CQFW began to work – i.e. once centres were able to construct programmes from a range of units rather than qualifications, that there would be consequences for post-approval external moderation/verification QA process.

### **3. The role of external QA awarding body staff in pre and post approval QA**

We have seen how external moderators/verifiers played an important role in assigning credit to units in awarding in qualifications. These staff bring extensive subject/occupational experience to their roles, and as working moderators/verifiers have a close understanding of teaching and assessment practice. Providers are likely to raise issues concerning curriculum and assessment with them, and they have first hand experience of sampling learners' evidence for assessment. In this project such staff played a key role in the assigning process, either contributing to or checking the decisions of awarding body colleagues or subject/sector experts on unit content, credit level and value, bringing their knowledge of the provider experience to the table and influencing assigning decisions. Assigning decisions were then taken by the awarding body and formulated into proposals to suit the operation of the existing regulatory system. As such, qualification amendments (in all but one case) were then submitted to the regulator for approval. However the assigning of credit to existing

qualification (units) was a new process for awarding bodies. Even after regulator approval, could they be sure that their decisions on credit value and level were right? To check and possibly amend these decisions, the practice of involving external awarding body QA staff in *post-approval* QA processes began to emerge as awarding bodies began to pilot use of approved units in the field.

*We have not changed QA systems and processes. We will be asking our Moderators to give us feedback on how the credit based units in the Employment Skills qualification work – whether the level and values chosen were right... we may tweak their responsibilities and the format of standardisation to include this.. (NCFE)*

Two pointers to changes in future practice emerge here; the involvement of moderators in *post-approval* feedback on assigned credit levels and values, and the need to add this task to their moderation responsibilities. There may also be a need for training of moderators to equip them to undertake this task consistently.

Information on the effectiveness or otherwise of assigning decisions will of course come from the experience of centres using these credit based units – and the experience and advice of centres will often be moderated through experienced external QA staff.

*We are now asking Centres [engaged in delivering the assigned units] to test out our credit decisions – get our results validated by practice. (City & Guilds)*

#### **4. Quality assurance and quality improvement**

*ACCAC and ELWA staff were involved in two workshops with centres that had delivered the revised units. We asked Centre staff, from their experience, were the credit values level and content of the units accurate and workable? (EDEXCEL)*

Direct involvement of the regulator in such post approval QA is a departure from usual practice; clearly regulator staff were learning about implementing credit too, and these experiences were no doubt invaluable to the development of their own understanding. This may also be a more effective way of working for both the regulator and awarding body, but will it be sustainable after the project has ended? If not, as is likely, how can such positive approaches to working with the regulator be incorporated into future practice?

And what are the consequences for regulation which broadens the focus of activity from pre-approval QA to post approval quality improvement? Normally qualifications are accredited by the regulator for a period of two

or more years. Amendments are made by application to the regulator by the awarding body. There is a danger that review of *units* (as well as qualifications) and their amendment through the regulator could become a bureaucratic and costly process and still fail to deliver improved products with the speed and efficiency providers should expect.

## **5. Provider involvement in quality assurance and improvement**

As awarding bodies became more confident in using credit based units they were able to encourage providers to use these units in customised combinations. As this practice developed, new issues began to emerge for awarding body QA staff:

- Where a programme is made up of a variety of subject/sector units there may be an issue if the external moderator/verifier is not an expert across that variety. This may be less of an issue at Entry and Level 1 where detailed subject/sector expertise is of less importance than a broad understanding of achievement requirements at those levels and because subject/sector content is of less importance than the transferable knowledge and skills being learned and assessed. However in the view of one awarding body (and its providers), verification of achievement would need subject/sector expertise at Level 2 and above.
- Subject/sector moderators could be used to sample and cross-check moderator/verifier decisions – a way of bringing subject/sector expertise to the process, but this may not be sufficient at level 2 and above.

This foretaste of experience is an important indicator for the future. Though some awarding bodies and providers are yet to be convinced that there will be a demand for customised learning and that qualifications will continue to be used to structure provision and consequently remain the main goal of most learners, the assumption (in taking the decision to develop the CQFW) is that this will not be the case in the longer term. In this project, it was clear that once providers began to realise the potential of using the credit system in this way the demand for customisation increased. Even where this customisation was provided by only a single awarding body, it signalled a potentially significant impact on future QA practice.

## **6. Are there implications for awarding bodies with a different QA infrastructure?**

Where does this leave awarding bodies that do not use external QA staff to QA assessment decisions made by Centres? Those awarding bodies that rely entirely on examinations and tests to assess achievement may be less likely to have an infrastructure in place which is readily adaptable to the new demands of a credit system, as described in this section. Their staff and operations are likely to be more centralised and their services to

providers organised and operated to suit the needs of an examination system, which by its nature is a more remote assessment and operational process. It is clear from project evidence that where awarding bodies were able to use their own external QA staff in assigning or checking assigning decisions, there was more confidence in the veracity of those decisions. However we know from this project that chief examiners are equipped with similar knowledge and experience to that of external moderators/verifiers, that they are subject experts who teach (and often manage) the curriculum they examine, and that their responsibilities for setting examination papers mean they have developed an intimate knowledge and understanding, over time, of the assessment requirements for their qualifications. In many cases these examiners play a different external QA role for the same or other awarding body qualifications.

### **7. ACCAC CQFW quality assurance monitoring reports**

As part of the ESF project, ACCAC appointed a team of consultants to examine how effectively awarding bodies in the project were meeting the (working) Credit Common Accord General Criteria in practice. Consultants produced an audit trail and judgement against each of the working general criteria for four of the First Wave awarding bodies. The ACCAC consultants' reports were consistent with awarding body views of their own practice; that awarding body QA practice in the project met the working criteria for the CCA satisfactorily. In some aspects of practice there were suggestions made by consultants for improvements to record keeping, training and selection of staff for involvement in the assigning process, though awarding bodies were in the main aware of these issues and were taking steps to address them. The consultants were generally very positive about the detailed and systematic approach taken by awarding bodies in assigning credit. Where issues arose (for example, in interpretation of CCA principles, determining (notional) learning time) these were consistent across the project and needed to be addressed for the CQFW overall. These common issues identified by the ACCAC consultants are addressed in different sections of this report.

In two instances consultants added their own discursive analysis which examined early impact on providers and their staff and awarding body staff and operations. It would not be fair to draw detailed conclusions from these discursive analyses. Yet it appeared that increased provider involvement in designing credit based units and ongoing improvement of the quality of credit based provision would have implications for the quality assurance of the CQFW in the (no too distant) future. Instances were cited where provider staff were likely to place additional demands on awarding body QA practice, particularly once the CQFW begins to take shape as a workable and comprehensive credit framework.

These included:

- Requests from provider staff to be able to play an active part in designing credit based units – weighing the costs and benefits to the awarding body of such increased involvement, including capacity building of provider staff required. Where awarding bodies did train provider staff in assigning credit, the process and outcomes were judged more consistent and reliable.
- Both a willingness and unwillingness in some cases to revise practice in the light of the introduction of credit – managing the impact of the division of a (previously determined) level 2 unit into a level 1 and a level 2 unit – where some provider staff felt this was a more accurate reflection of the unit requirements, others were concerned that this action undermined the value of achievements in the new level 1 unit. This may be an issue where provision is organised by providers into levels – and learners slotted into programmes at a particular level. A reluctance to shift practice among some providers may influence their thinking and opinions in designing credit based units. Awarding bodies will need to be aware that this is the case when involving providers in unit and qualification design.
- A demand for more credit based provision to be introduced quickly as learners were keen to access and gain achievement as they progressed through a programme, and a demand for additional (sometimes optional) units to recognise new skills and knowledge being introduced to the programme year on year. This may place a strain on awarding body resources and the capacity of the regulator to manage approval of additional units.
- Discovery of significant unrecognised outcomes - in planning and evaluating, for example - as a result of reviewing existing units.
- Discovery that evidence can emerge from learning activity in pursuing one set of (qualification) units that could be used to count towards achievement of another awarding body's units offered by the same provider.
- Positive impact for learners likely to drop out mid-year – the fact that they gain credit for their achievements as they progressed appeared in one case to have a positive impact on their achievement and retention – this is likely to increase demand from providers where there are problems with learner retention and achievement. Recognition that learners are able to achieve units at different rates, especially evident when learning is 'remote' and self-organised. In both instances there will be issues of manageability of

assessment and implications for the timing of moderation/verification/unit certification.

- Timing of the introduction of new units was crucial to providers – quite small changes to assessment requirements had an impact on curriculum organisation and preparation.
- Understanding at provider level of key concepts in using credit – notably (notional) learning time versus contact time, prerequisite learning, and matching unit requirements to the evidence presented by learners, rather than matching learners to whole qualification routes.
- Provider staff involved from different subject/sector areas need to share their experience and develop cross curricular expertise in using credit.

Whether the existing approach to quality assurance should be adapted or rethought to accommodate such new and perhaps increased demands on the regulation and quality assurance of the CQFW continues, at the time of writing, to be a subject for discussion.

## **8. Regulating the CQFW: the future of regulation and awarding body QA in the CQFW**

From the outset beginning with the discussions which lead to the establishment of the Credit Common Accord there has been a discussion about the nature of regulation and quality assurance of the CQFW; what kind of regulation was needed for a credit framework? Given the aspiration of regulators to move towards 'lighter touch' regulation, would the establishment of a credit framework (rather than a pure qualifications framework) mean there was a need for a rethink on regulation and awarding body QA? This issue surfaced regularly at CCAF meetings and discussions at the FAB Framework and Credit group. The feeling was – before there was a move to *amend* existing practice, should stakeholders not use the opportunity to think more broadly about the purpose and value of regulation and awarding body QA, and go back to the fundamental question – will the current approach to regulation for the NQF work for the CQFW? Should not stakeholders agree the fundamental principles and purpose of QA, and once agreed, use these as the starting point for developing regulations and QA practice to suit?

We referred earlier in this section to the continuing debate about the future regulation of the CQFW and there is no doubt the awarding bodies have used this debate to 'think outside the box' on regulation and awarding body QA. This has been driven as much by the broader impetus for reform and dissatisfaction with the regulatory environment created by

the NQF as any new demands which may be made on the system by the introduction of credit through the CQFW.

*The stance on regulation in our industry is at a high level of principle. The regulators don't know or prescribe the detail of how awarding bodies design or operate qualifications – they take the line that you [the awarding body] submit a proposal and we will tell you if it's acceptable or not. Awarding bodies have learned to fill that vacuum through bitter experience! That's the way it worked for the NQF. (FAB)*

The introduction of credit does not (per se) mean that regulators have to change this fundamental 'stance' on regulation, though we can see from the issues discussed in this section already that credit will begin to have an impact on approaches to regulation and QA, as providers have access to more credit based units in (and across) the CQFW. We can see from the way in which this project has been conducted that the experience of awarding bodies in the project has been different from the experience described here. The First Wave awarding bodies and SEMTA are all members of the CCAF and worked together to develop the CCA, test its principles and develop the CQFW through practice. ACCAC has been a partner throughout in this sense, and has had to regulate awarding body activity in the CQFW at the same time.

*The project created the need for processes to manage and take forward submissions. ACCAC is receiving submissions of qualifications with units, credit and level, which are in the NQF and have to be managed through the joint regulatory function...As these are existing qualifications, existing systems for awarding bodies and the NQF have been used to avoid any additional bureaucracy. Other regulatory bodies have been kept informed and advised all along as these are jointly regulated qualifications. (ACCAC)*

The evolution of new regulations for the CQFW – drafted for use within the project and then shaped and informed by project practice – is critically different from the way in which regulations for the NQF were developed. The idea that the principles and criteria contained within the CQFW can be trialled and revised in a systematic way requires both willingness on the part of awarding bodies to engage in this task and open collaboration with the regulator, who ultimately will have to take responsibility for their application and interpretation.

This approach has depended on the development of mutual trust both between awarding bodies and between them individually and collectively, with the regulator. There is a belief among all stakeholders in the CCA Forum that this is the only way such a radical reform of the qualifications system can be implemented and managed; no single stakeholder has the capacity to introduce such reform without the support and trust of all the others and this can only be achieved through collaboration.



The engagement of a number of awarding bodies in the development of the CQFW has meant that they have a genuine interest in seeing the CQFW succeed; it belongs as much to them as to the regulator. This is clearly different from how these awarding bodies (and FAB) viewed their stakeholder interest in the NQF.

As part of the project, FAB commissioned an analysis of the implicit and explicit quality assurance principles to be found in relevant regulatory documentation for the CQFW. The purpose of this exercise was to stand back from current regulatory practice of the NQF and identify the underlying principles behind the operation of regulations adapted for the CQFW and awarding body QA practice. The exercise was useful in distilling those principles for discussion. The key question at the time of writing is whether and how each of these principles should be applied in the regulation and QA of the CQFW.

There is an expectation that analysed credit practice (and guidance) that has emerged from the project will both inform the interpretation of quality principles and shape regulation of the CQFW.

*For example, if awarding bodies knew/understood from comparison that methods A B or C were all sufficient for assigning credit – there would be no obligation to use a particular method but we would all have confidence in whichever method was chosen. (FAB)*

This way of building confidence across awarding bodies is quite different from the practice of centralised approval of their processes and systems by the regulator.

*Quality principles are needed – and awarding bodies compliance with them... it's so important that processes are comparable – but not the same. A baseline of confidence is needed across awarding bodies for mutual trust and comparability of product and service. (FAB)*

Can awarding bodies continue the partnership they have made with the regulator in developing the CCA and implementing credit through the project?

*If awarding bodies work with the regulator to develop the regulatory framework... we have a critical mass now involved through the CQFW project... we have built the CQFW together so we have to make it work together, build it together so we can operate it together. (FAB)*

Inter-awarding body agreement on QA principles, and perhaps even a level of sharing of practice, coupled with a demand from providers for more involvement on design and improvement of products for the CQFW,

suggest there is a need for fresh thinking on how to build mutual confidence in the quality of operation of the CQFW. This suggests that a practice based developmental approach is what is needed to take regulation of the CQFW forward, building on mutual trust between the CQFW stakeholders, expanded to include providers, employers and learners.

## Section 10. Awarding Credit

### 1. Summary

Two distinct aspects related to awarding credit are discussed in this section:

- the issues that arose for awarding bodies in adding (or planning to add) credit information to certificates and notification of results, and
- mutual recognition of credit achievements between awarding bodies operating within the CQFW.

We examined how awarding bodies in the project either awarded credit based units within qualifications or made internal preparations of their own to report and/or certificate achievement and include credit information in qualification and or unit certificates and notification of results; why one awarding body raised issues concerning certification across England and Wales for learners registered in Wales and for learners living in England and registered with and through providers/centres in Wales; discussed the questions that were raised by awarding bodies on the need for a centralised system for maintaining records of credits achieved and looked at why not all awarding bodies had planned to notify learners with credit information on certificates and notification of results in the same way.

We have also addressed separately the question of *mutual recognition* (of credit achievements) in this section. We have stood back from the technical questions of how credit achievements in the CQFW could be mutually recognised by awarding bodies and discussed some fundamental questions about mutual recognition which should engage stakeholders (including employers, education institutions and learners). We believe a wider discussion is needed for 'buy-in' - for mutual recognition to begin to work across all these interest groups.

The concept of mutual trust is discussed in this context (a prerequisite for effective mutual recognition). This raised interesting questions concerning the locus of responsibility for mutual recognition (beyond regulation), and examined the consequences for a 'voluntary' model of mutual recognition and the range of stakeholder support that would be required to make mutual recognition work in practice.

Credit Works has contributed a separate discussion paper of its own to FAB on technical principles for Mutual Recognition of units and qualifications across awarding bodies.

## **10.1 Awarding credit – adding credit information to certificates and notification of results**

### **Adapting internal systems to the demands of credit**

Awarding bodies faced issues in using and managing credit information, for learners (on units/qualifications certificates, in notification of results); for themselves and providers (maintaining credit information about their own units and qualifications, and learners' credit achievements), and in the interface between awarding bodies – a national system for maintaining all or some of this information.

All awarding bodies appeared to be able to adapt their existing systems to the demands of the CQFW for the purposes of the project. Typically though, responses suggested

*We have made changes for the pilot – wider introduction may be a different matter... (EDEXCEL)*

The degree to which adding credit information to their own systems was problematic related partly to the qualifications chosen for the project. Some awarding bodies were able to add this information to their existing system

*[Once the qualification is accredited] ...we will put credit information on the unit summary page ... and introduce a field which shows that credit has been awarded as part of the CQFW project. Unit certificates will include unit title, credit value and level. (NCFE)*

### **Different external rules for certification**

Though no awarding body reported specific obstacles to adding this level of credit information to their own systems, technical capacity was not always the issue. Different, sometimes external, rules for certification of achievement sometimes were.

*...on the status of certificates with credit added - GQs, Welsh for Adults and the BAC all present different reporting, awarding and certifying issues. (WJEC)*

Where there were fundamental questions still to be resolved, on credit and General Qualifications for example, awarding bodies were unwilling to best guess the plans or potential requirements of the authorities for certification. See 4.2 for a discussion of GQs and credit.

### **Recognising the value of credits awarded in piloting the CQFW**

Not all of the awarding bodies in the project aimed to or actually certificated credit achievement. For those that did however, there were unanticipated problems that needed resolving while the project was

ongoing. The boundaries between England and Wales were far more permeable for learners and centres than at first recognised. Learners registered with providers in Wales were often (in significant proportions) resident in England. Credit (CQFW) information was included in their certificates regardless of the learner's country of residence.

*...With the coming of the FfA [framework for Achievement] this has to be resolved – it is an equal opportunities issue for learners – the credit they receive has to be valid across Wales and England at least – we have many English learners registered in Welsh centres! (WAMITAB)*

The main objective of all the awarding bodies in the project was to ensure that the validity of any credits awarded in the piloting and implementation phases of the CQFW was safeguarded and honoured. In the view of those awarding bodies for whom this was relevant, any learners receiving credit certificates as a result of the project needed to know that this information was valid across England and Wales, and would ultimately also be recognised (as of value) in Northern Ireland and Scotland. For the purposes of the project, awarding bodies and the regulator agreed that 'Welsh learners' were defined as those learners registered in Welsh centres.

Awarding bodies in the project made it clear they were unable to consider dealing with two credit management information systems in Wales and England.- This is an issue beyond the control of the awarding bodies but essential to their ability to use the CQFW (alongside any other credit framework in the UK) - the interface between the awarding body MIS and any individual national system for Wales - and beyond that, any interface with *other* national systems - the QCA proposed operational/business model for the FfA, for example.

## **Reporting grading information**

On grading credit achievements:

- Should the credit transcript carry grade information to fully represent a learner's achievements?
- Where will grade information appear if not on the credit transcript?

## **A central record for the CQFW**

*... should awarding bodies be duplicating information about credit on certificates [in addition to the credit transcript] or will this add to bureaucracy? (Edexcel)*

The questions on grading are perhaps symptomatic of the absence (as yet) of a clear plan for maintaining a central record for the CQFW. Do

awarding bodies need to carry credit information on certificates or is this a duplication of the function of the (centrally maintained) credit transcript – does this information need to be held in more than one place?

In the absence of published plans for a central record for the CQFW, awarding bodies in the project signalled such potential for duplication. At the time of writing, awarding bodies, through and with their centres, are the only organisations maintaining a record of credits achieved in the CQFW.

### **Planning for full implementation**

One major awarding body in the project summarised what they were doing to prepare for full implementation of the CQFW [and FfA], beyond the project. It reported:

- Building reporting of credit and level in to major internal system change
- Reporting credit on all unit certificates
- Qualification certificates will stay the same – a separate [awarding body own] record will show credit information
- Anticipating a demand for unit *and* qualification certificates into the medium term –so they will provide them
- If [funding] targets change from full qualifications to combinations of units the impact of credit will be much greater and have consequences, among other things, for keeping records, certification and interoperability with a national information system.

## **10.2 Awarding credit - mutual recognition of credit achievements between awarding bodies operating within the CQFW**

Signatories to the CQFW CCA agree to:

*Recognise the award of credit of other bodies that are signatories [of the CCA] should they decide to allow learners to transfer credit into their award structure...*

The CQFW places no obligation on any recognised body<sup>7</sup> to go further than this. In the early days of the development of the CCA, this objective may have seemed ambitious enough. Awarding bodies had yet to begin to make use of credit in designing units and qualifications. Towards the end of 2005, with the issue of ownership of units at the foreground of awarding body concern with the emerging FfA in England, there was a need to show that a collaborative, voluntary mutual recognition of credit achievement was plausible and workable. At the time of writing, a model for mutual recognition was in development for the CQFW. This report

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<sup>7</sup> For the purposes of this project and report, the named awarding bodies and one SSC.

makes no comment on those proposals as they stand at the time of writing.

This section examines broad but important questions concerning mutual recognition, and in particular at the relationship between cooperation, mutual trust and mutual recognition. We also look at mutual recognition from an SSC perspective, focussing on evidence from the SEMTA experience in the project.

All the evidence submitted for this analysis suggests that there is need for mutual recognition of the value of credit awarded among the full range of stakeholders; awarding bodies but especially employers, education institutions and learners. However the technical means of mutual recognition is achieved, the currency of awards transferred depends upon buy-in from all these stakeholders, including awarding bodies. We also suggest that this objective could be achieved by both voluntary collaboration and through improved transparency in regulation.

Mutual trust between stakeholders is a prerequisite for effective mutual recognition. Awarding bodies will have to trust that the processes and principles which underpin awards of credit made by their competitors are robust, reliable and comparable. Institutions constructing programmes from units operated/owned by different awarding bodies will expect the same. If learners use transferable units to construct their programmes and routes to HE, they will need to know that the combination of credits they are awarded are recognised and accepted by the receiving institution. So how can such mutual trust be fostered and established?

### **Mutual trust – between awarding bodies... and the regulator**

We have suggested in Section 8 that a changed relationship between the ACCAC and awarding bodies evolved during the life of the project and that the partnership established between them will need to continue for the CQFW to fully succeed in the future, despite the tension between the different roles and responsibilities of the two parties.

*Awarding bodies are all approved by the regulator now and their qualifications are all accredited into the NQF – but there is no mutual recognition across awarding bodies – mutual confidence is needed not just in the units [in a credit framework] but in assessment processes. Mutual recognition cannot depend on the regulator – awarding bodies have to be confident about each other's processes. And that they are reaching the same standards...*

(FAB)

This suggests that a centralised system (voluntary *or* compulsory) of approval/accreditation of units would not on its own be sufficient to build

confidence across awarding bodies sufficient for workable mutual recognition.

This raises interesting questions concerning the locus of responsibility for mutual recognition (beyond regulation), and again suggests that there is a need for continuing collaboration between CCA stakeholders to maintain and develop mutual trust and confidence - and a method of regulating which places a measure of responsibility upon 'recognised bodies' for the CQFW - awarding bodies and SSCs - overseen by an external regulator capable of intervention when necessary.

*There is an expectation that the regulator should intervene where quality standards are being breached or compromised - which they seem reluctant to do now. (FAB)*

Both parties would need to act voluntarily for such an arrangement to work, with mutual self regulation operating between awarding bodies to prevent standards being 'compromised'. Practice (as suggested throughout this report) could (to a degree) be shared between awarding bodies to improve the quality of unit and qualification design, and in itself would build ongoing mutual confidence. Intervention - the 'stick' of compulsion/coercive action, reserved for regulator intervention when breaches of standards occur, would help to focus awarding bodies on self-regulation.

There is of course a tension for awarding bodies between acting in each other's mutual interest and competing for business in the market. Awarding bodies do now appear to be clearer about where their mutual interests lie,

*Awarding bodies have changed though - they are more active in coming up with collaborative ideas for introducing change. Led in the main but not exclusively by the larger awarding bodies, they have become more business focussed - they understand their businesses more and are more analytical than they were three or four years ago. This then affects the way they respond to proposed reform - why for example, should they accede to proposals that they don't think will work for their businesses? Awarding bodies are much more aware now of where their business is [in the market] and how it should operate to be successful. (FAB)*

This level of mutual interest depends upon a level of mutual trust, needed for mutual recognition between awarding bodies. The distinctions (and tensions) between their interests remain, but acting in their collective interests to drive and influence reform is a relatively new concept.

The point where mutual interest in collaboration ends has shifted through the life of the project as mutual trust has evolved.



*The driving cost in designing qualifications is assessment. The cost of some parts of the process matter less and ways of managing new requirements around credit may be shared [perhaps assigning?] - but approaches to assessment are less likely to be shared – because of competition.*

*On awarding for example, awarding bodies will share principles but not the detail – this part of the service is what can distinguish one awarding body from its competitors – maybe cost savings, better quality of service... (FAB)*

So awarding bodies will continue to distinguish their products and services in the marketplace and draw their own boundaries around what is in their mutual interest to share. What *is* and is *not* shared is however underpinned by the application of a set of quality principles which apply to all recognised bodies and their units and qualifications in the CQFW,

*The answer is that quality standards need to apply across all units and qualifications in a credit framework. Mutual recognition needs to apply across the spectrum of non formal, customised, general and occupational qualifications – a platform of quality standards which applies to all aspects of their design and operation. (FAB)*

This perspective is rehearsed in Section 9 and we suggest is an essential prerequisite for mutual recognition between awarding bodies (and all other CQFW stakeholders) to work.

### **SSCs and employers – another perspective on mutual recognition**

Before we examine technical aspects of mutual recognition of credit achievement in the CQFW, we would like to take into account the perspective of the SSC involved in the project – and the employers that they represent. Any model of mutual recognition will need their engagement and support.

*The solution is perhaps the development of mutual confidence across awarding bodies [not just through the regulator] and now that confidence needs to involve SSCs too. The idea that SSCs SQS will approve occupational qualifications (and their assessment strategies) may produce consistency and comparability – but what about non SQS qualifications and their quality and validity - where will they fit in? (FAB)*

One task for SEMTA in the project was selection and approval of in-company training programmes for inclusion in the CQFW. These programmes were not accredited in the NQF.

*The issue of mutual recognition [across awarding bodies] of the in-company achievements we have described only comes up if there is an 'award' somewhere along the line and a single awarding body signs off that award on the basis of credit accumulated across a number of ABs. If they resist or are not prepared to then we have a problem... however if the learner just accumulates credit from different awarding bodies and adds them to their credit record then mutual recognition between awarding bodies does not matter – especially if employers (and/or the SSC) recognises the value of [a variety of] such credit achievements [in the CQFW]. I think though we will need awards to show how many credits people have got – you know maybe a 'gold award' for 50 credits for example.*

*And this may be related to how universities regard CQFW credits for progression into HE. (SEMTA)*

This is a different perspective on mutual recognition – and suggests that there is a need for cooperation between awarding bodies for learners to be rewarded for the milestones they reach as their skills and achievements are recognised at work – 'a 'gold award' for 50 credits' for example. Rules of combination would no doubt still apply, but perhaps in a more flexible way than for occupational qualifications designed to demonstrate the achievement of competence. However, there may not always be a demand for mutual recognition. Whatever system is devised to resolve the technical obstacles to mutual recognition between awarding bodies, the demand for mutual recognition is more likely to be driven by employers and learners and by providers where funding arrangements are driven by political priorities in Wales. This suggests that investment in processes for mutual recognition of units – potentially costly for the regulator and awarding bodies – should be governed by demand rather than principle. However SEMTA experienced the flip side of taking a purely demand led approach.

### **Managing and collaborating to meet the demand for mutual recognition**

What demand did we find in the project for mutual recognition? We have referred to the drive for agreeing a model for mutual recognition among awarding bodies. The process of mutual recognition could be costly and time consuming. SEMTA's experience provided an early indication that apparent demand for mutual recognition should be taken at face value, and that managing that demand will need the involvement of SSCs, employers and awarding bodies.

Demand may be skewed by the unforeseen effects of public funding priorities. SEMTA's initial experience in calling for sector programmes for proposed accreditation into the CQFW was instructive in this respect. Private training providers sought endorsement from SEMTA for in-company training programmes by seeking their inclusion in the CQFW –

partly driven by their understandable commercial interest in gaining SEMTA approval for the content and quality of their training, perhaps as well as improved access to public funding. 90% of training programmes put forward were in management and business development. Many SSCs may have to deal with such demand for recognition of in-company training programmes offered by training companies with commercial interests.

Employers themselves are perhaps less likely to be interested in such endorsement and could be motivated by mutual recognition of learning outcomes to save money, help with recruitment and improve productivity,

*There is a difference too between training provider and company motivation – the training provider’s product is training – the company provides internal training when it has to in order to improve productivity... We have now decided to aim to bring in 40 programmes from which we will select 20 for the project. We are now looking for different specific programmes which relate to product development, including operating [machinery and equipment] – i.e. which develop operative engineering skills needed in our sector. (SEMTA)*

If an SSC becomes proactive in this way and selects in-company training programmes on the basis of diversity, demand and the aim to recognise and value in-company training, then mutual recognition between employers of the status and value of such achievements will be needed. Companies will recognise the validity of credit awarded elsewhere using other criteria – SSC approval, awarding body certification and fundamentally, evidence of achievement from observation of day to day operation of machinery and equipment.

Inter-awarding body collaboration will be needed if they are to provide an award for the achievement of combinations of such credit achievements.

### **Recognition of units and qualifications across UK country credit frameworks**

Awarding bodies offering NVQs, SVQs, GCSEs and GCEs operate across at least one UK country boundary. VRQ awarding bodies, in most cases, operate across Wales, Northern Ireland and England.

*We are trying to negotiate recognition [for our assignment of credit decisions] across the CQFW and the SCQF... I think they could populate each other’s frameworks... (City & Guilds)*

The technical differences between the CQFW and FfA proposal in terms of the fundamental principles of credit are minimal. Both frameworks use the credit-based unit as the building block of the credit framework.

The SCQF (currently) assigns credit values to approved/accredited qualifications. These qualifications are not necessarily composed of credit based units specified in the CQFW and FfA. Technically however, it appears, from SCQF published requirements, that CQFW units and qualifications could be assigned credit in the SCQF – which would be welcomed by learners and employers and by awarding bodies offering products across national boundaries.

## **Appendix 1. Awarding bodies involved in the project**

### **'First Wave' Awarding Bodies:**

- City & Guilds
- EDEXCEL
- OCR
- WAMITAB
- WJEC

SEMTA also participated as a project partner in the First Wave of the project

### **'Second Wave' Awarding Bodies:**

- AMSPAR
- ASET
- CACHE
- NCFE

3 further awarding bodies 'shadowed' the Second Wave group:

- AAT
- IIB
- SAS

## Appendix 2. A full list of qualifications included in the project

Name of awarding body	Qualifications included in the ESF CQFW Project <sup>8</sup>
ASET	ASET Level 2 Certificate in Emergency First Aid in the Workplace ASET Level 2 Certificate in Moving & Handling (Individuals) (Objects) **
CITY & GUILDS	Introductory Diploma in Travel & Tourism Level 1 Diploma First Diploma in Travel and Tourism Level 2 Level 2 Certificate in Mental Health Work Level 3 Certificate in Community Mental Health Care Electrical and Electronic Servicing NVQ level 2 (Signal Reception) Electrical and Electronic Servicing NVQ level 3 (Signal Reception) Entry Level Certificate in Using ICT (Entry 3) (Start IT) NVQ level 3 in Early Years Care and Education First Diploma in Culinary Arts (level 2)*
EDEXCEL	Edexcel Level 2 BTEC First Diploma in Public Services Edexcel Level 3 BTEC National Diploma in Public Services (Uniformed) Edexcel Level 3 BTEC National Certificate in Public Services (Uniformed)

<sup>8</sup> All qualifications listed were already in the NQF with the exception of \* (not listed) \*\* (new proposals for the NQF and CQFW) \*\*\* (BTEC Customised qualifications for inclusion in the CQFW). OCR qualification units were processed and tested for the project but not submitted for inclusion in the CQFW. WJEC qualifications listed \*\*\*\*are scheduled for submission during the current implementation of the CQFW to 2007.

	<p>Edexcel Level 2 BTEC First Diploma in Performing Arts (Music)</p> <p>Edexcel Level 2 BTEC First Diploma in Business</p> <p>Edexcel Level 3 BTEC National Diploma in Business</p> <p>Edexcel Level 2 BTEC First Diploma in Manufacturing Engineering</p> <p>Edexcel Level 2 BTEC First Diploma in Electronics</p> <p>Edexcel Level 3 BTEC National in Vehicle Repair and Technology (Light Vehicle)</p> <p>BTEC First Diploma in Vocational Studies</p> <p>BTEC Award in IT Skills for Business</p> <p>BTEC Certificate in IT Skills for Business</p>
OCR	<p>OCR Entry Level Certificate in Enterprise (Young Enterprise Team Programme) Entry 3</p> <p>OCR Level 1 Certificate in Enterprise (Young Enterprise)</p> <p>OCR Level 2 Certificate in Enterprise (Young Enterprise)</p> <p>OCR Level 1 Certificate for IT Users (New CLAIT)</p> <p>OCR Level 2 Certificate for IT Users (CLAIT Plus)</p> <p>OCR Level 3 Certificate for IT Users (CLAIT Advanced)</p> <p>OCR Level 1 Certificate in Administration</p> <p>OCR Level 2 Certificate in Administration</p> <p>OCR Level 3 Certificate in Administration</p> <p>Customer Service NVQ Level 2</p>

	<p>Customer Service NVQ Level 3</p> <p>Key Skills at Level 2</p> <p>OCR Level 1 National Certificate in Health and Social Care</p> <p>OCR Level 2 National Certificate in Sport</p> <p>OCR Level 3 National Extended Diploma in Sport</p> <p>OCR Level 2 NVQ for IT Users</p> <p>OCR Level 3 NVQ for IT Users</p> <p>OCR AS GCE in Sociology</p> <p>OCR Advanced GCE in Sociology</p> <p>OCR GCSE in Applied Business (Double Award)</p>
WJEC	<p>Welsh for Adults ****</p> <p>Components [units] of Welsh Baccalaureate Qualification****</p>
AMSPAR	<p>Certificate in Medical Terminology for Non-Clinical Professionals Level 3 **</p>
CACHE	<p>CACHE Level 3 Diploma in Home-Based Childcare **</p>
NCFE	<p>NCFE Level 1 Certificate in Employment Skills</p>



WAMITAB	<p>Level 4 in Waste Management Operations: Managing Landfill Hazardous Waste</p> <p>Level 4 in Waste Management Operations: Managing Landfill Non-Hazardous Waste</p> <p>Level 4 in Waste Management Operations: Managing Treatment Hazardous Waste</p> <p>Level 4 in Waste Management Operations: Managing Treatment Non-Hazardous Waste</p> <p>Level 4 in Waste Management Operations: Managing Transfer Hazardous Waste</p> <p>Level 4 in Waste Management Operations: Managing Transfer Non-Hazardous Waste</p> <p>Level 3 in Waste Management Operations: Inert Waste</p> <p>Level 3 in Waste Management Operations: Civic Amenity Site</p> <p>Level 4 in Waste Management Operations: Managing Incineration</p> <p>Level 3 in Waste Management Operations: Closed Landfill</p> <p>Waste Management Operations: Level 1</p> <p>Waste Management Operations: Level 2</p> <p>Waste Management Supervision Level 3</p> <p>Managing Waste Collection Operations Level 4</p>
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### Appendix 3. FAB organised project activities

Date	Meeting	Delegates
<b>2004</b>		
23 Aug	FAB Framework and Credit Group	14
30 Sept	FAB Framework and Credit Group	12
15 Nov	FAB Framework and Credit Group	10
25 & 26 Nov	FAB National Conference – credit seminar on 26 <sup>th</sup> Nov	62
14 Dec	FAB Framework and Credit Group	12
<b>2005</b>		
19 Jan	2 <sup>nd</sup> wave – initial meeting	12
2 <sup>nd</sup> Feb	FAB Framework & Credit Group meeting and meeting with CQFW team	18
9 <sup>th</sup> Feb	FAB meeting with John Valentine Williams (ACCAC) to discuss CQFW	14
12 <sup>th</sup> Apr (am)	2 <sup>nd</sup> wave meeting	13
12 <sup>th</sup> Apr (pm)	FAB Capacity Building Seminar on CQFW	18
19 <sup>th</sup> Apr	FAB Framework & Credit Group	10
3 <sup>rd</sup> Jun	FAB Framework & Credit Group	11
16 <sup>th</sup> Jun	2 <sup>nd</sup> wave meeting	10
1 <sup>st</sup> Jul	FAB Capacity Building Seminar on CQFW	16
21 <sup>st</sup> Jul	FAB Framework & Credit Group	9
20 Sept	<i>FAB Capacity Building Seminar on CQFW</i>	
<i>To be completed in December 05.</i>		

## **Appendix 4. Primary and secondary sources**

### Interview Records with staff and representatives from the following organisations

- ACCAC
- ELWA
- FAB
- City & Guilds
- EDEXCEL
- OCR
- WAMITAB
- WJEC
- SEMTA
- CACHE
- NCFE
- ASET
- AMSPAR

### Awarding Body and SSC Reports

- OCR first Interim Report, April – Oct 2004
- OCR second Interim Report, Nov 04 – June 05
- City & Guilds, Interim Report, July 04 –March 05
- City & Guilds Interim Report, 20<sup>th</sup> July 05
- City & Guilds Report on the Development of Units, July 05
- City & Guilds April – June 05
- EDEXCEL, May 04 –Jan 05
- WJEC, March 05
- WAMITAB, May 04 – Jan 05
- SEMTA quarterly report, April 05 – June 05
- Additional Awarding body and SSC progress reports and presentations to ESF Implementation Group meetings

### ACCAC Audit Monitoring Consultants Reports

Interim and Final Reports for:

- City & Guilds
- EDEXCEL
- OCR
- WAMITAB

### Minutes of Meetings 04-05

- ESF project Implementation Group
- CQFW Credit Common Accord Forum
- FAB Credit Working Group/Framework and Credit Group
- 2<sup>nd</sup> Wave Awarding Body Group
- FAB building awarding body capacity seminar notes

### Published Documents

- Implementation Plan, Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales
- Credit Common Accord
- Assigning and Awarding Credit for Stage 1 Pilot, CQFW, Working Document, ACCAC June 2004
- CQFW Stocktake Research Final Report December 2004 – January 2005
- Guidance on Determining Credit and Level Values for SVQs Units and SVQs DRAFT – Version 5, Miller West, 2004

### Miscellaneous

- Awarding Body submissions to ACCAC
- Copies of units submitted
- Presentations at conferences and events (e.g. CQFW presentation to QCA)
- FAB/CQFW seminar report 12.04.05
- Responses to mini survey of awarding bodies. Nov. 04
- *Learning from the FAB Credit and Qualification Framework for Wales Project, Dec 04*
- *Learning from the FAB Credit and Qualification Framework for Wales Project, Credit Works second update report: April 2005*
- Internal Awarding Body and SSC (assigning credit) processing documents and forms.
- Additional case study material provided by Awarding Bodies and SSCs

### CQFW CCA Forum Discussion Documents

- Mutual Recognition
- Quality assurance principles for the CQFW

# Getting the best from the QCF

Final report on the support and capacity building programme for UK Sector Skills Councils and Standard Setting Bodies, for the development of units and qualifications as part of the VQ reform programme (including QCF) and the alignment of priority qualifications with public funding

**July 6 2009**

## Contents

- 1 The Support Programme in brief
- 2 Methodology
- 3 The Credit Works *Process Map*: A route to developing a sector relevant framework of units from which all QCF qualifications and pathways can be drawn
- 4 Programme activities and outcomes – a summary
- 5 Issues and analysis
- 6 Recommendations and points for discussion for Ofqual

### Appendix 1

Suggested process for assigning credit and level to QCF units

### Web Links:

1. [Skills for Care and Development SSC: selections from a Project manager's QCF support pack](#)
2. [A Summary Of Summit Skills Design Principles And Assessment Characteristics For QCF Units And Qualifications](#)
3. [SB Self assessment questionnaire](#)
4. [UK Vocational Qualifications Reform Programme \(UK VQ RP\) and LSC](#)

# 1 The Support Programme in brief

## Introduction

This report describes and analyses the programme of training and support for those Sector Skills Councils (SSCs) and Standard Setting Bodies (SSBs)<sup>1</sup> not engaged in the LSC/QCA QCF fast track programme 2007 -2008. The programme focused on support for the development of units and key vocational qualifications for the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF), as part of the VQ reform programme and the alignment of key vocational qualifications with public funding in England.

### 1.1 Summary of the Report

**Section 1: The Support Programme in brief** - provides background information on the programme, a summary of what the training and support programme provided and which SBs were involved and an overview of project activities.

**Section 2: Methodology** - outlines sources of evidence and other information used in writing this report, the basis of analysis of our interactions with SSCs and SSBs and the methodology we used to conduct our analysis and produce this report.

**Section 3: The Credit Works Process Map** and how it was used by SSCs and SSBs.

**Section 4: Support activities and outcomes** provides a summary of the project activities, milestones and outcomes; headline information on the training and support provided and Credit Works interactions with SBs; including types of events and activities.

**Section 5: Issues and analysis** identifies the main issues that arose in the programme and provides an analysis.

**Section 6: Recommendations** sets out actionable recommendations to address the issues identified in our analysis as well as a number of **discussion** points.

**Appendix 1** is a *Suggested process for assigning credit and level to QCF units*; an example of a tool that can be used to support SBs through a key stage in the development of QCF units, working with and consulting AOs and providers to ensure the right expertise is used in coming to decisions and ensuring Ofqual requirements are met by those (QCF unit) submitting organisations not approved to award QCF qualifications.

### 1.2 Background

#### 1.2.1 LSC priorities

A summary of background information on the UK Vocational Qualifications Reform Programme (UK VQRP) and specifically LSC's priorities to 2013 can be found using the web link on the Contents page of this report. This programme primarily supported LSC's work in achieving priorities 1 and 2.

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<sup>1</sup> Sector Skills Councils and Standard Setting Bodies are collectively referred to as 'Sector Bodies' (SBs) through the report and as SSCs and SSBs only where it is necessary to make a distinction.

The programme focused on support to develop key qualifications which would be publicly funded and identified in SSC SQS and subsequent SSC/B (completed) Action Plans (APs); specifically full Level 2 qualifications.

LSC was the contracting organisation for this project. Key agencies, particularly UKCES, QCA and Ofqual were consulted throughout.

### 1.2.2 LSC planned work and the support programme

The LSC is taking forward the implementation of the QCF with a view to business processes being fully aligned to the QCF by 2010. As part of QCF implementation the LSC is focusing on the following critical areas:

1. Aligning funding to support the new framework
2. Aligning performance measures to support the new framework
3. Reviewing the implications for business processes of funding bodies of QCF implementation
4. Transition planning

This programme primarily related to the objectives of bullet point 2.

*" The project will, through focused capacity building activities, support SSCs/Bs to address specific areas of LSC priority with regard to implementation of Vocational Qualification Reform (specifically sector qualification reform and the QCF), including development of qualifications for:*

- *Entry Level and Level 1 to populate Progression Pathways being developed as part of the Foundation Learning Tier programme*
- *'Full level 2' qualifications*
- *'Full level 3' qualifications*
- *Level 4 qualifications*
- *Unit development*<sup>2</sup>

The Credit Works training and support programme operated between November 2008 – March 31 2009 and was designed to assist those specified SBs in the development of QCF units and qualifications for use as soon as possible and at the latest for delivery from August 2010.

### 1.2.3 The Credit Works 'Process Map'

Credit Works began work on the development of a *Process Map* in 2007, working with SSCs and awarding organisations (AOs) through the QCF tests and trials, then the fast track support programme for SSCs in 07/08<sup>3</sup>, and then the support programme in 2008-2009. Credit Works developed this *Process Map* with SBs as a tool to help SBs get the best from the QCF. The *Process Map* was introduced in this project at the initial seminar with SBs in November 2008 and was the key conceptual and methodological tool used by Credit Works to underpin and manage the SB training and support programme.

The *Process Map* therefore is a direct result of collaborative work with SBs between 2007-2009. The version included in this report has not been published or circulated

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<sup>2</sup> LSC Project brief

<sup>3</sup> Credit Works, *Support the development of fast-track qualifications into the QCF as part of the VQ reform programme and the alignment of priority qualifications with public funding*. LSC 2008



before; this project used the *Process Map* from the outset and each SB took from what was most useful to them. All SBs in one way or another contributed to its development during this project.

The *Process Map* is meant to help SBs get the best from the QCF by creating a sector relevant framework of units and includes:

- the concepts underpinning the *Process Map*
- a design model
- and a methodology that can be used to get from A to B – from National Occupational Standards or any other reference point to a sector relevant framework of QCF units, pathways and qualifications.

The *Process Map* has no formal status – its representation in this report does not mean that it is endorsed in any way by LSC. The *Process Map* summarises and sets out in a neutral structured form what we would consider to be and have identified as SB best practice to date in strategic use of the QCF.

The main recommendation in this report made by Credit Works is for QCA and SBs to consider the *Process Map* and make best use of it to support strategic sector use of the QCF.

The *Process Map* is not a substitute for current QCA guidance; it makes best use of the guidance published at the time of writing and in Recommendations in Section 6 below we suggest that a number of tools could usefully be developed by QCA (and other agencies if appropriate) to enhance strategic sector use of the QCF. Some of the tools suggested may already be 'in the pipeline' for development; which tools are now developed is a matter for QCA and other relevant agencies to decide.

### **1.3 Sector Bodies engaged in the training and support programme**

On behalf of the LSC, Credit Works provided expert support to develop the capability and capacity of specified SSCs and SSBs to develop QCF units and key vocational qualifications for public funding for use in their sector and across sectors. The project focused on SSCs that were not targeted for the first phase Fast Track support programme in 2007-2008<sup>4</sup> and a number of specified SSBs. Capacity building activities focused on supporting these SSCs and SSBs to develop agreed QCF units and key vocational qualifications for public funding.

The programme built on the work to support SSCs and their associated awarding bodies (now referred to in the QCF as awarding organisations (AOs)) undertaken through the QCF tests and trials (2006-2008); the work undertaken for LSC and QCA to support the development of fast track qualifications by SSCs and their associated AOs; and address recommendations made in the Credit Works report, April 2008.

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<sup>4</sup> The 'fast track' support programme in 2007-2008 built the capacity of and supported 11 SSCs and their associated awarding bodies in developing units and vocational qualifications for the QCF which were a priority for public funding.

<b>Sector Skills Councils:</b>	<b>Standard Setting Bodies:</b>
Skills for Care and Development	Council for Administration
LLUK	Institute of Customer Services
Skillsmart Retail	Management Standards Centre
Summit Skills	<b>And from January 2009:</b>
Government Skills	SFEDI
People 1st	HABIA
E and U Skills	CILT
Skillset	MSSSB
Asset Skills	ECITB
Go Skills	
Automotive Skills	
Financial Services Skills	
Creative and Cultural Skills	
Skills for Justice	

The project focused on cross-sectoral SSBs in the first instance; further scoping resulted in a number of LSC specified SSBs being included in the support programme from January 09 with a remit to focus on development of full level 2 qualifications.

## 1.4 The training and support programme offer

### 1.4.1 The programme:

1. Provided initial guidance to enable specified Sector Bodies (SBs) to undertake self-assessment of their own technical capacity and capability to take forward and oversee the development of QCF units and priority qualifications for funding. The self assessment process was designed to be simple and straightforward to ensure each SB considered all implications before Credit Works embarked on offering any proper training and guidance. As part of its self assessment each SB was required to specify staff and identify their roles in relation to unit and qualification development; ensure that senior management in the organisation agreed to and were committed to a strategic approach to QCF unit and qualification development; sign up

to a support programme which was synchronised with the SB Action Plan (AP) including agreed outputs for delivery by March 31 2009.

2. Used the Credit Works *Process Map* to demonstrate how a sector framework of units could be developed to generate all QCF qualifications and respond to a range of demands; from sector as well as government priorities, to demands from employers for recognition of the outcomes of in-company training. This approach worked successfully in 0708 with those fast track SSCs looking for a way to use the QCF strategically and systematically.
3. Used the outcomes of each SSC/B self assessment to design customised packages of support to be agreed with specified SSCs/Bs based on their initial assessment of their SQS AP.
4. Provided each specified SSC/B with training and guidance to take forward QCF units and priority qualifications for funding identified in SQS and subsequent SQS APs, taking account of all logistical factors and ensuring synergy with the LSC timetable for the process of progressively aligning funding with SSC approved vocational qualifications within the QCF (i.e. full level 2, full level 3, and appropriate units and qualifications at Entry Level and Level 1).

#### **1.4.2 Customised training and support**

Credit Works offered high level strategic support and advice, delivered face to face training and provided on-line and telephone expert technical support to SBs.

Support packages included a number of training modules based on the experience, models and resources developed through the fast-track (2007-2008) process.

These included for example:

- How to Develop a Sector relevant Framework of QCF Units pathways and Qualifications for your Sector
- Developing structures for priority qualifications
- Using rules of combination (RoC) to Support Qualification Purposes and Credit Accumulation and Transfer (CAT)
- Writing QCF Units

During the programme Credit Works also developed a suggested process for assigning credit value and levels to QCF units. Training and workshops in applying this process was also provided to SBs.

Specialised training and development activities were also undertaken, in relation to for example, developing a single assessment strategy for all VQs in a sector; recognising prior learning and achievement; using the QCF to recognise the outcomes of in-company training; how to develop qualifications at Entry Level and Level 1 that will be eligible for inclusion with FLT Progression Pathways.

Projects were supported to develop specific units and qualifications to meet QCF technical specifications. This included, amongst other areas, support to:

- Interpret and use the guidance materials for developing units and qualifications in the QCF
- Develop units that are described in terms of outcomes and assessment criteria
- Determine the level of units
- Determine the credit value of units

- Combine units through rules of combination to coherent qualifications
- Consider assessment requirements and arrangements
- Align qualifications at Level 2 with Level 2 design principles

### 1.4.3 Dissemination and Sharing Practice

Appropriate methods, including use of the Credit Works website, were used in the project to disseminate and share best practice among SBs. The project made positive use of the expertise developed through the QCF Tests and Trials (2006-2008) and the Fast Track Support Programme (2007-2008) and increasingly as the programme developed, new expertise developing among SB staff. Credit Works used its good offices to bring SB staff together to problem solve where there was mutual interest, to broker mutual support where possible and appropriate; involve and worked with SB staff in the delivery of training modules and seminars.

Credit Works disseminated and shared best practice among SSCs/Bs through email, focus groups and seminars, and its own website. Dissemination activities were used to:

- Help SSCs/Bs understand what the LSC means by key vocational qualifications aligned to funding
- Provide tips, shortcuts, hints or guidance in using the QCF to develop units and qualifications
- Identify and share good practice identified through the support programme
- Reference and, if appropriate, build upon existing QCF materials and guidance

The detailed technical support provided focused on those qualifications and units which were likely to be eligible as priority qualifications for funding. SSCs were able to transfer knowledge and skills acquired in this way to the development of all QCF units and qualifications.

### 1.4.4. Response to the support programme offer

The support programme offer was welcomed at the initial seminar and in telephone interviews conducted before and after the seminar. The offer appeared to respond to SB need; there was strong support from the outset for the *customised* approach and in almost all cases the response was, 'Yes, we will need all of that'.

Participants also welcomed the offer of informal and continuous telephone support offered by a named Credit Works Director.

Participants were keen to learn from each other and we found we were increasingly channelling examples of good practice through all available channels; in workshops and other face to face meetings, via email and the Credit Works website. The strong interest in sharing ideas and information on line meant that we concentrated our efforts on developing a resource to deliver this rather than planning collaborative seminars. Though we used the Credit Works website for invitation only forum discussions on key topics, we found that participants in practice were looking for guidance from our team on what constituted good practice and accurate interpretation of the regulations and guidance. As SBs develop their skills in using the QCF we would hope they become more confident about sharing practice and solving problems.

## 1.5 Overview of programme activities

**The programme made good and steady progress** from inception in November 2008 and delivered the major outputs through to March 31 2009 on time. SSCs/Bs were positive in their responses to the offer of training and support from the outset.

November 08	A <b>briefing paper</b> was circulated to all the SSCs/Bs along with a <b>self assessment response pro forma</b> . <b>Telephone interviews</b> were conducted with participants. <b>Self assessment responses were delivered on time</b> , (November 10 2008) with one exception. The <b>'launch' seminar</b> at LSC on November 3 <sup>rd</sup> was well attended and well received by all participants. Credit Works <b>Associates</b> attended an initial briefing/training seminar and delivered support and guidance to SBs on unit development. Credit Works Directors undertook <b>strategy sessions</b> with each organisation's management <sup>5</sup> in December and January (with one exception undertaken in early March); <b>training days</b> were delivered through December 2008 and January 2009 and remaining commitments booked through to March 2009. <b>Telephone and email advice</b> on unit and qualifications development was provided between December 2008 and March 2009; <b>web development</b> put online advice, information, learning resources and forums for collaboration in place. Open Forums for Learning were accessible on the CW website and SSCs/Bs in the project received <b>passworded access to Special Forums</b> from January 16 <sup>th</sup> . SBs said they would in the short term, prefer to interact and access information and examples of practice on line and meet face to face to problem solve in areas of agreed mutual interest. One Credit Works' Director was allocated to each SSC/B and provided <b>ongoing advice to relevant SSC/B named SMT members</b> .
December 08 - January 09	
December - March 09	

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<sup>5</sup> Except for those SSBs that joined the programme in January 09.

## 2 Methodology

Each of the specified SBs was sent a briefing paper on the programme and requested to attend a launch seminar at LSC. The substance of the briefing paper is summarised in Section 1.6 above.

Each SB named contact was then asked to complete a self assessment questionnaire (see web link to the questionnaire on the Contents page of this report) by a specified date on current SB capacity and capability in respect of the QCF and their SQS and implementation of their Action Plan, with a focus on priority qualifications for public funding. Initial telephone discussions or face to face meetings followed with a CW director, to interpret the self assessment results and agree a planned training and support programme to March 31 09.

Meetings with members of the QCA QCF team (in November 2008) and UKCES Director of Qualifications (January 09) were held to describe the programme and explain the Credit Works' approach. Issues and questions relating to the QCF Regulations 2008 were addressed in discussions with Ofqual via email and telephone.

Regular contact was maintained with the LSC contract manager and LSC VQ team members.

These interactions were supplemented by desk research to analyse emerging policy development, implementation plans and related issues, e.g. on full level 2 and 3, FLT Progression Pathways, and the LSC Annual Statement of Priorities 09/10 were examined.

Information from SBs was collected from interactions throughout the training and of the support programme and through continuous dialogue between Credit Works and the SBs. Analysis of notes and logs of the following activities provided a rich source of information and opinion that helped to identify the issues and analysis set out in Section 5 and frame the Recommendations in Section 6.

These activities included:

- o training days
- o workshops
- o planning meetings
- o AO forums
- o telephone discussions
- o email exchanges
- o snapshot surveys
- o final evaluation by SBs

## 3 The Credit Works *Process Map*

### 3.1 Origins and rationale

SBs' role in implementation of VQ reform is now central and the demand for rapid progress is even greater than it was a year ago. We believe SBs must work methodically on QCF unit and qualification development to meet aspirations and deadlines. Our approach has been to encourage SBs to plan their route in detail using (what we have called) a *Process Map* to guide them through.

The *Process Map* is intended to help SBs realise these key policy objectives:

- Support the transfer of achievement, and the accumulation of achievements towards full qualification (CAT)
- Encourage and support progression
- Simplify the offer to employers and learners
- Make the system more accessible
- Make the system more flexible
- Avoid unnecessary repetition and duplication of learning and assessment

And to be used to design or accommodate:

- Full level 2 and 3 requirements
- FLT Progression Pathways
- Apprenticeship pathways and qualifications
- Customised employer qualifications
- Cross-sector pathways to qualifications

The training and support programme was about how to support SBs to get the *best* from the QCF to design key vocational units and qualifications for publicly funded VQs and to realise these reform VQ aspirations; hence the title of this report.

This meant making best use of the experience of all parties involved in the QCF tests and trials (2006-2008), the SSC Fast Track programme and report (2007-2008) and the current QCA support pack and the guidance therein. We also made use of our experience in working on the development of the CQFW (2004-2006) and as SBs became more engaged in the detail of how to get the best from the QCF, ways of working explored in research undertaken for development of the QCF (2003-2009).

We began the programme with a concept, model and methodology for using the QCF which we called the Credit Works *Process Map*. This was developed with significant SB involvement in the SSC Fast Track (2007-2008) programme. The *Process Map* was presented at the LSC launch seminar on November 3<sup>rd</sup> 2008 and was developed and refined through SB input and shared practice during the programme. It is still a work in progress; as practitioners develop new ideas and ways of getting the best from the QCF, these must be shared.

The Process Map refers to and is intended to work effectively within the parameters of the Ofqual Regulations for the QCF (2008). Best use is made of the QCF support pack and guidance which is referenced throughout.

The QCF regulations and guidance have been interpreted and explored with SBs to develop (and improve) the *Process Map* over time.

**NOTE:** The *Process Map* describes stages in planning and designing QCF units and qualifications that need consideration *ahead* of the detailed exercise of developing units and qualifications for the QCF to meet the QCF technical requirements and regulations. Ofqual regulations and all QCA published guidance were used and considered throughout.

### 3.2 Sector Body 'must haves'

There are of course other ways to use the QCF. However the Fast Track Project (0708) found<sup>6</sup> that whatever an SB's approach, there were 'must haves' for SSCs/Bs if they were to succeed in using the QCF to realise government aspirations for qualifications reform. The Process Map is intended to help SBs to understand and make use of these following 'must haves':

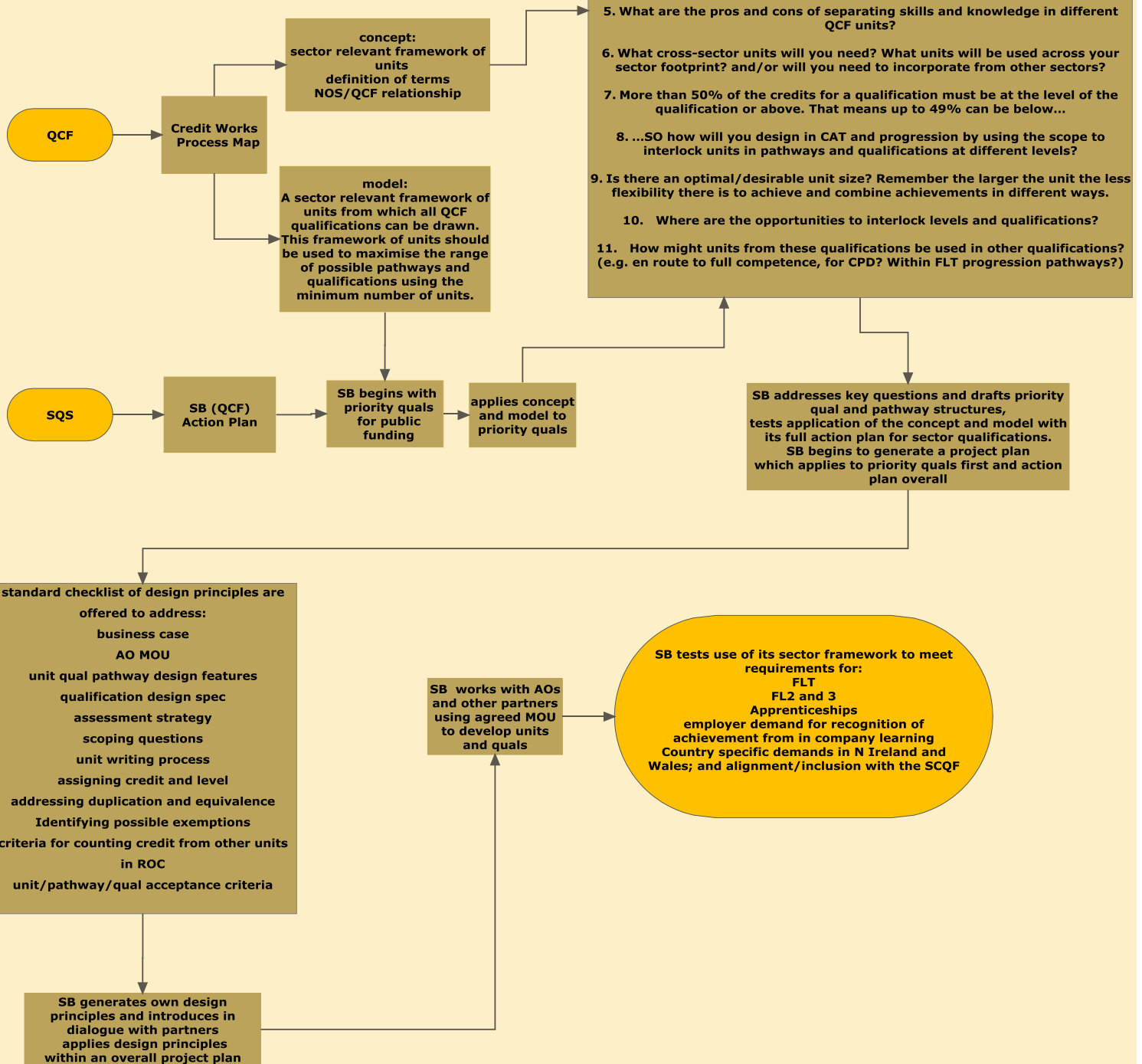
1. A clear **concept** of the relationship between QCF units/qualifications and National Occupational Standards (NOS)
2. A **model** which allowed the SB to identify:
  - 2.1. An **overall rationale for rules of combination** for QCF qualifications for their sector
  - 2.2. An **overall plan** for QCF pathways and qualifications
  - 2.3. **How the skills and knowledge** required to meet standards will be **identified and assessed** using QCF units
  - 2.4. **A methodology** for developing a sector relevant framework of units, pathways and qualifications
3. An **adaptable learning approach** which allows partners and any party with a legitimate interest to challenge and test the SB's concepts and methodology

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<sup>6</sup> Credit Works, *Final Report Support the development of fast-track qualifications into the QCF as part of the VQ reform programme and the alignment of priority qualifications with public funding*. LSC April 7 2008



## A simplified application of the Credit Works Process Map



### 3.3 What is the Process Map?

The *Process Map* provides a route from any reference point (NOS, other standards, legislation, a syllabus) to a sector relevant framework of QCF units from which all QCF VQs can be drawn. It comprises a **concept, model and methodology**, and these are set out in this section.

**Please use the diagram above to guide you through the explanation in this section of how we use the *Process Map*.**

The following examples can be found using the *web links* on the Contents page of this report. These exemplify how some SBs have applied the *Process Map* to meet their own sector requirements:

- Skills for Care and Development has used the *Process Map* to develop a set of design principles and apply them to the task of creating a sector relevant framework of units, pathways and qualifications, packaging them within a *Project Managers Support Pack*. We have added selections from the SFCO pack as examples.
- Summit Skills has developed an Assessment strategy and set of Assessment requirements *by cohort* so that the same units can be accessed and used by all learners, from new entrants to experienced qualified workers.

Who should do what and when?

- We would advocate that the SB takes the lead on key qualification development;
- that the SB works with employers to seek agreement and understanding of their 'broad rules of combination' and the benefits of their approach to the QCF;
- and with AOs and providers on the mechanics and detail of design and delivery.

Whether or not the SB is a recognised organisation for submitting units and/or rules of combination, the *Process Map* encourages working from the general to the specific, involving interest groups as appropriate en route. As the tasks become more specific it will be important to work within design principles and unit/qualification writing conventions, especially where a number of internal and external staff are involved in the detail. This will save money, time and energy.

#### 3.4.1 **Concept: defining Knowledge and Skill**

First, define the terms: to understand the *Process Map* concept, model and methodology we needed a strong degree of consensus on these terms, not necessarily word for word but certainly conceptually.

**Knowledge** is the outcome of the collection and assimilation of information through learning.

Some SBs found the following further division helpful.

**Process knowledge** - acquired information necessary to do a job. This is the minimum knowledge you need in order to operate at work – pushing the right buttons to make a machine produce lager, knowing the right clothing to wear at

work, knowing how to cut wood in a straight line, knowing the right proportions for mixing materials.

**Additional knowledge** – acquired information related to but not always needed to do a job. Such knowledge may enhance understanding such as understanding of principles of fermentation, of food contamination, of properties of materials, of chemical reactions, of wider aspects of law, of the composition of beauty products.

Additional knowledge is often included in Apprenticeship qualifications to provide a broader base of knowledge and understanding among new entrants than is required to meet the 'threshold of competence' for a particular job role. Such knowledge may have been included in a technical certificate but was not necessarily explicitly identified as additional (rather than process) knowledge.

NOS are likely to contain Process knowledge and may not contain additional knowledge; this is understandable as NOS are generated from functional analysis of occupational roles, where process knowledge dominates.

Some employers may however require their staff to have additional knowledge, of their company, its methods and its products. A sector relevant framework of units can accommodate recognition of such additional knowledge and within Rules of Combination for a qualification, without undermining the pre-eminence in the qualification of necessary process knowledge and skills.

This accommodation is important for SBs; employers are more likely to understand what they want from process knowledge and have different views on additional knowledge. The SB needs to design ROC that can accommodate these differences while maintaining the overall coherence of the pathway or qualification.

These knowledge concepts emerged originally from work with Improve SSC in the Fast Track programme 0809 and how they saw different types of knowledge and how these 2 types could be recognised through QCF units. Some SBs have found the distinction useful in writing their design principles for QCF units and qualifications.

**Skill** - the ability to use and apply one's knowledge effectively and readily in execution or performance.

Skill is not to be confused with 'competence' or 'proficiency'. These are overarching terms for the application of a combination of skills and knowledge – and in the language of VQs - ultimately demonstrated in the 'workplace'.

### **3.4.2 Concept: The relationship between NOS and QCF units/qualifications**

Almost all SBs were now happy to accept that NOS and QCF units are not the same. The practice of N/SVQ design that effectively replicated NOS as they were written as the basis of VQs was probably the cause of most misunderstanding (about the NOS/QCF relationship) among SBs in the QCF tests and trials (2006-2008) and the Fast Track programme (2007/2008). It was noticeable that the NOS/QCF relationship was much less of a conceptual issue in the 2008/09 support programme and only a small minority of SBs (one SSC and one SB) continued to attempt to replicate NOS 'one to one', word for word in QCF units.

QCF units of assessment can be used to measure whether a person has the necessary skills and/or knowledge and understanding to meet the requirements of an occupational standard. One simple way of distinguishing NOS from QCF units and qualifications is to see QCF units as the means of assessing whether an

individual has met occupational standards (regardless of how these standards are expressed) through a process of learning and assessment that is transparent and objective. NOS describe 'what an individual needs to do, know and understand in order to carry out a particular job role or function.' The question to ask is, 'what skills and knowledge does a person need to meet those requirements?' - and that is what is assessed through the QCF unit.

### 3.4.3 **Concept:** recognising skills and knowledge requirements in a QCF unit

A QCF unit may be written which:

- Groups skills and knowledge together
- Separates skills and knowledge so that it is possible to assess their achievement discretely
- Even though skills and knowledge may be contained in separate QCF units, this does not mean they have to be acquired and assessed separately.
- A QCF unit may be used to measure achievement of Skill, Process Knowledge or Additional Knowledge requirements contained in one standard, or several standards.
- Several QCF units may be used to measure achievement of the requirements contained in one standard.

This was for many SBs a crucial point in how they conceptualised the QCF and how to make best use of it. Other SBs were not so sure; they preferred to keep to their familiar (if not necessarily flexible) models of VQ development. Some AOs were vehemently against it; some initially because they misunderstood the implications for assessment instrument design, others because the approach would not sit easily within their current systems. **In Section 5** we have highlighted why it is in the interest of SBs and AOs to take advantage of this flexibility in the QCF.

NOTE: There are issues of interpretation of the regulations which are also a potential obstacle here. We have explained these in Section 5 and discussed how to address them with Ofqual through the current evaluation of the QCF regulations (2008).

### 3.5 **Model:** Fundamental purpose

The Process Map is founded on a simple model. Each SB should develop:

- **A sector relevant framework of units from which all QCF qualifications can be drawn. This framework of units should be used to *maximise* the range of possible pathways and qualifications using the *minimum* number of units.**

Support focused on using this model to get the best out of the characteristics and technical features of the QCF, rather than simply working through development of a list of qualifications which failed to connect and articulate adequately.

#### 3.5.1 **Model:** A 'single' sector relevant framework

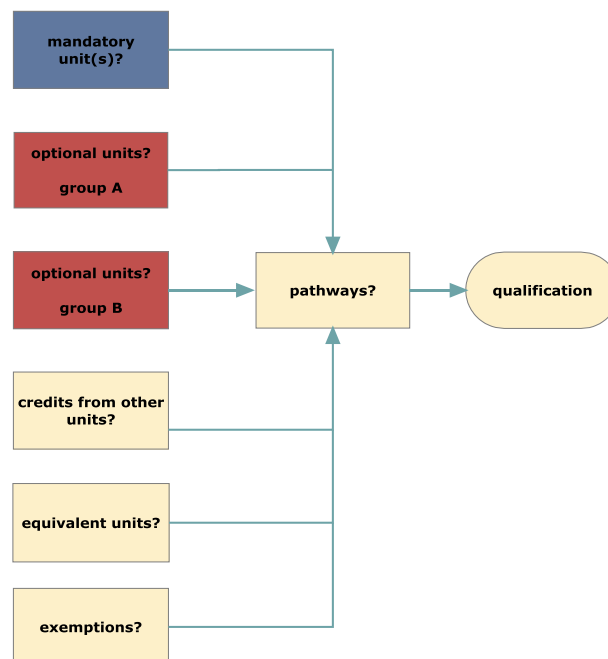
Even where an SB has many sub sectors and lots of qualifications, the aim was to encourage a single overall approach to qualification design, so the process for qualification development and interaction with other players (and the SB response to them) could be consistent and systematic, and still open to development and improvement.

A single sector relevant framework of QCF units should be able to recognise:

- all the skills and knowledge requirements in NOS which need to be assessed.
- that the proximity of the relationship between NOS and QCF unit will vary according to purpose
- that all sector QCF qualifications can be drawn from this framework
- that the framework can develop over time with input through the SSC from any stakeholder

### 3.6 Methodology: Developing broad rules of combination, a specification for units and qualifications in a sector, starting with Priority Qualifications:

#### considering all the options: devising broad rules of combination for priority qualifications



We drew a standard diagrammatic model for ROC, to work from broad rules of combination to specific ROC for a qualification. This diagram was the starting point for developing broad rules of combination.

Once the **concept** and **model** had been explored with SBs, we worked with them to *apply* these, starting with their priority qualifications. In all cases sector priority qualifications were occupational, designed to recognise achievement of a 'threshold of competence' for an occupation at a particular level and were likely to attract public funding.

The SB's priority qualifications are the *starting point* for developing its sector relevant framework of units. So while focusing on the design of SB priority qualifications, our task was to use a methodology that would at the same time generate units for each sector framework which could be used to:

- Construct pathways within the occupational qualification
- Create smaller 'steps towards' competence qualifications
- Create CPD awards for experienced and qualified workers (in areas of new knowledge or regulation for example)
- Create opportunities for progression through credit accumulation and credit transfer within the priority qualification to other qualifications within the sector and across sectors.

**Setting 'broad rules of combination'** means identifying skills and knowledge sets for inclusion in priority qualifications. At this stage we suggest the SB does not try to identify units, levels or credit values in too much detail; it is important to map the overall structure first to ensure there is consensus among all parties with an interest. This allows the SB to share ideas internally, with employers and then AOs without committing itself too early to detail. This saves resources and encourages influential dialogue with employers, AOs and providers within the parameters provided by the SB – the outcome of actions in 3.7 and 3.8 below.

### **3.7 Methodology: Applying the Process Map to SB requirements**

We began applying the *Process Map* through strategy sessions with each SB, asking and discussing these key questions in relation to their priority qualifications:

1. What will the overall structure(s) look like?
2. How will you use ROC to maximise opportunities for progression and minimise duplication of learning and assessment?
3. What essential units will you need? Will these always be mandatory or could they (in some cases) reside in tightly controlled optional groups? (Remember units can be mandatory in one qualification and optional in another).
4. What optional units will you need? Could you create a second optional group where the relative value of achievement is proportionately weaker within the ROC, so that options are less constrained? How might you use this approach to incorporate employer specific (e.g. product /process specific) units into optional groups without disturbing the balance of the qualification? Or to create Apprenticeship pathways, incorporating Additional Knowledge units as requirements for this cohort?
5. What are the pros and cons of separating skills and knowledge in different QCF units?
6. What cross-sector units will you need? What units will be used across your sector footprint? And/or will you need to incorporate from other sectors?

7. More than 50% of the credits for a qualification must be at the level of the qualification or above. That means up to 49% can be below...
8. ...SO how will you *design in* CAT and progression by using the scope to interlock units in pathways and qualifications at different levels?
9. Is there an optimal/desirable unit size? Remember the larger the unit the less flexibility there is to achieve and combine achievements in different ways.
10. Where are the opportunities to interlock levels and qualifications? (See diagram below)
11. How might units from these qualifications be used in other qualifications? (e.g. en route to full competence, for CPD? Within FLT progression pathways?)

### Where are the opportunities to interlock levels and qualifications?

Award = 1-12 credits  
Certificate = 13-36 credits  
Diploma = 37+ credits

	AWARD	CERTIFICATE	DIPLOMA
Entry level			
level 1	9		
level 2		9	
level 3		2	
level 4			
level 5			
level 6			
level 7			
level 8			

- In the above example there are 2 qualifications, an Award at level 1 and a Certificate at Level 2.
- The minimum number of credits to be achieved for the Certificate is 20 credits.
- ROC specify that more than 50% of these credits for the Level 2 Certificate must be at level 2 or above. In this example, 9 of the credits are available at level 1, 9 of the credits are available at level 2 and 2 credits are available at level 3.
- In this example, the 9 credits at level 1 also constitute a Level 1 Award. Thus a learner achieving the Level 1 Award can transfer that achievement towards the Level 2 Certificate.
- It might also be possible for the 2 credits at Level 3 (and some of the level 2 credits) to be transferred to a level 3 Award, Certificate or Diploma.

### 3.8 Sector Framework Design principles and project planning

At this next stage, having addressed these key questions (3.7) the SB develops drafts priority qualification and pathway structures, and begins to test application of the concept and model with its full action plan for sector qualifications. This means applying what is being learned in designing priority qualifications to the whole of the Sector's framework.

To assist in this, we worked with those SBs in the programme that were ready and willing, to draft design principles that they could apply across their frameworks and (from our perspective) could be shared as they were developed, across all SBs via the SB Forum on our website.

The checklist of design principles addresses:

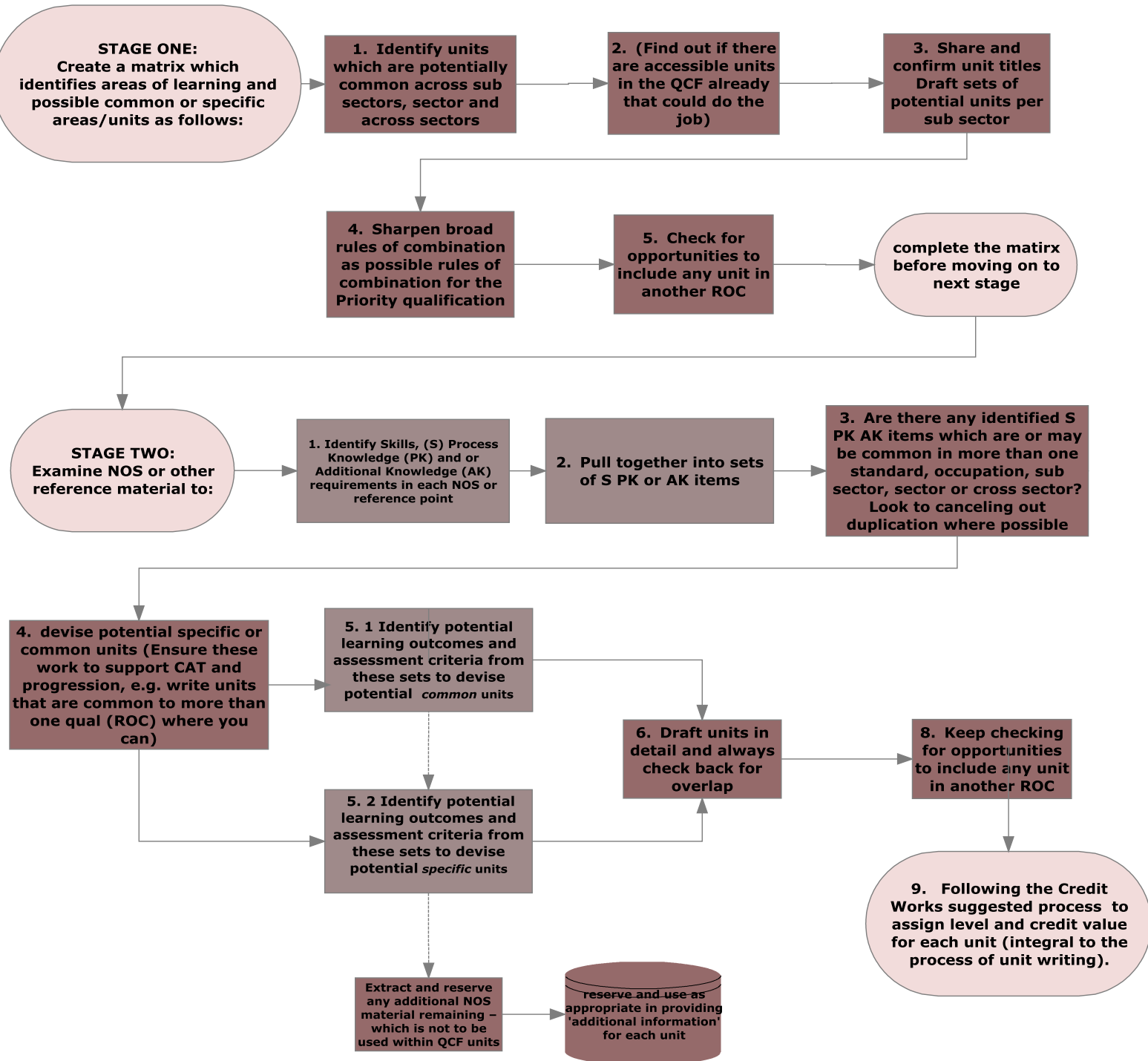
1. Developing a business case for a unit pathway or qualification
2. What to address in a memorandum of understanding (or similar) MOU with AOs
3. How to create a unit/qualification/pathway design specification for the SB's sector framework
4. What to include in a qualification design specification
5. What to address in a single SB assessment strategy
6. Scoping questions
7. Unit writing process
8. A suggested process for assigning credit and level to QCF units
9. How to identify and address duplication and use equivalence
10. Identifying possible exemptions
11. What criteria might you use for counting credit from other units in ROC?
12. Unit/pathway/qualification acceptance criteria

See the weblinks in the Contents page and the methodology in this section for examples.



### 3.9 Methodology: Writing the QCF units needed from NOS (or other reference point)

## Methodology: writing the QCF units needed from NOS (or other reference point)



After the SB has considered all the questions in 3.7 and established 'broad rules of combination', we suggest a methodology as follows for drafting unit titles and broad content to reflect NOS (and or other) requirements.

**3.9.1 Create a matrix which identifies areas of learning and possible common or specific areas/units as follows:**

1. Identify units which are potentially common across sub sectors, sector and across sectors
2. (Find out if there are accessible units in the QCF already that could do the job)
3. Share and confirm unit titles
4. Draft sets of potential units per sub sector
5. Sharpen broad rules of combination as possible rules of combination for the Priority qualification
6. Check for opportunities to include any unit in another ROC

**a matrix to identify possible areas of learning and possible common or specific areas/units as follows**

<p>→</p> <p><b>qualification/pathway</b></p> <p><b>area of learning / possible common or specific units</b></p> <p>↓</p>			

It is important to complete this stage before moving on to the next.

**3.9.2 Examine NOS or other reference material to:**

1. Identify Skills, Process Knowledge or Additional Knowledge (S PK or AK) requirements
2. Pull together into sets of S PK or AK items
3. Are there any identified S PK AK items which are or may be common in more than one standard, occupation, sub sector, sector or cross sector? Look to canceling out duplication where possible

4. Devise potential specific or common units (Ensure these work to support CAT and progression; e.g. write units that are common to more than one qualification (ROC) where you can)
5. Identify potential learning outcomes and assessment criteria from these sets and ensure that you note the source NOS number/code or other signifier in the process.

**NOTE:** Ofqual regulations and QCA guidance was referred to and cross-checked throughout the *Process Map* development. *At this stage* however it is particularly important to follow closely Version 3 of the QCA guidance on writing units for the QCF – including Section 3, on writing units from NOS.

6. Draft units in detail and always check back for overlap
7. Cancel out any overlap out where you can
8. Keep checking for opportunities to include any unit in another ROC
9. Following the Credit Works suggested process<sup>7</sup> to assign level and credit value for each unit (integral to the process of unit writing).

### 3.9.3 Tips for SBs writing units following the *Process Map* approach

- Examine NOS statements and using the definitions provided, identify sets of S PK and AK items in each NOS statement - and look elsewhere in the NOS too - in aims and or purpose - you may find material here too. How easy it is to source this information depends upon how the NOS are written. If NOS are written as a set of tasks, then the skills and knowledge requirements may be implicit and a subject expert needed to identify them. How easy this task is using other reference points will vary widely; but identification of S and K requirements is fundamental to the process of writing QCF units, whatever methodology is used.
- Use of conventions in unit writing and titling can help easy identification of unit type where possible
- S PK or AK relationship to standards can be made explicit in unit aims
- Avoid unnecessary prescription of delivery and assessment requirements. Use the web link on the Contents page of this report to find an example of how Summit Skills have developed an assessment strategy which sets assessment requirements by cohort, prescribes where necessary and is flexible where it is appropriate and possible.
- Designing smaller units for the QCF (1-6 credits) can help in devising flexible ROC, making the unit viable in a range of pathways, qualifications and contexts for learning. In this programme most SBs aimed to create smaller QCF units where possible though it was recognised and understood that overall coherence of the unit should as a principle come first.

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<sup>7</sup> See Appendix 1 for details of the Credit Works suggested process for assigning credit and level to QCF units. SBs used this to develop their own process, or as a checklist if they already had a process in place.

*Note: We stressed to SBs in the programme that none of the above suggestions on unit design were rules that had to be slavishly followed. But in their approach to unit, ROC and qualification design they should:*

- *Stick to a plan and a methodology*
- *Review and adapt their practice systematically and regularly*
- *Allow minor change and innovation to happen very quickly, keeping tabs on impact until next review*

### **3.10. Implementation of the Model for an SB SQS and action plan**

The *Process Map* model should enable each SB to:

- Design a framework of units which meet the NOS requirements and which can be combined in ROC for all its sector QCF qualifications
- To manage a range of foreseen and unforeseen demands
- To allow the SB to respond systematically to demand
- And remain open to new proposals - without losing coherence of its overall framework and plans

### **3.11 Responsiveness of the Model and SBs**

A range of demands would be placed on each framework and SBs must be able to respond to these demands and demands that are unforeseen in a systematic way and within its overall plan and model. An SB should *not* be in a position where it has to design new units and qualifications to meet every new demand (wherever from). The model was designed to avoid this.

The SB should be open to thinking differently and adapting the model to new ideas and accommodate the recognition of learning achievements which do not neatly correspond to the model – living with difference and/or reviewing its approach if need be.

SBs have to be able to manage their framework responsively and imaginatively and should, in our view, avoid hard wiring their systems too early or at all. SBs must be adaptable and prepared to adapt and adjust and develop their approach as different challenges are presented and be able to do this quickly.

AOs, employers, providers and government will judge (and indeed measure) SB performance against their responsiveness.

## 4. Programme activities and outcomes

**NOTE:** Credit Works has provided a more detailed separate Project Management Report to LSC. This section summarises the project inputs and outputs (**4.1 – 4.4**) and provides examples of programme activity (**4.5**). These activities typify the majority of responses to the programme by SBs. As each programme was customised to SB requirements however, the level and type of programme activity varied across SBs.















### 4.1 Project inputs and outputs

The project met the required objectives of the Project Plan on time and delivered the outputs required. Though it was not possible to organise formal KIT meetings as regularly as we would have hoped, we used email exchanges with LSC to raise issues as they emerged and resolve these where possible. After discussion with LSC the final report was delivered at the end of March 2009. The programme continued right to the end of March, with support and feedback provided up to March 31<sup>st</sup> 2009.

Support the development of units and qualifications into the QCF as part of the VQ reform programme and the alignment of priority qualifications with public funding 2008-2009

Workstream	October 07				November 07				December 07				January 08				February 08				March 08							
	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4				
1	Project initiation briefing paper, self assessment pro forma issued, initial telephone interviews undertaken, initial briefing/training of Associates, initiating work on web and learning resources																											
2	Guidance and support to SSCs/Bs on self assessment of capacity/capability and identification of volume and type of support needed by each SSC/B																											
3	Collaborative work planned																											
4	SMT strategy days with SSCs/Bs																											
5	Provide expert training and technical support																											
6	development of resources to build capacity																											
7	Regular monitoring of the developments of the qualifications and regular progress reports to LSC. (email/telephone exchange, 6 weekly telekits and 1 review meeting)																											
8	Production of interim and final project reports																											
9	Continuous dissemination of good practice and resources																											
10	Management and Quality Assurance																											

KEY	
	Milestone marker
	Output
	Telekit

milestones		date	
1	Briefing paper & self assessment response pro forma circulated to all SSCs/Bs		week 2 October 08
2	Support programme launch seminar		week 1 November 08
3	Progress report including overall project plan		week 2 November 08
4	Self assessment of capacity/capability returned by each SSC/B		week 2 November 08
5	Nature and volume of support programme completed with each SSC/B		week 3 December 08
6	topics and dates for focused seminars agreed		week 3 December 08
7	strategy days with each SSC/B SMT completed		week 3 December 08
8	web forums and blog established		week 4 December 08
9	Appraisal of support requirements of additional SSBs		week 4 January 09
10	Contract variation made		week 1 February 09
11	telekits		Approx. every six weeks
12	Review meeting with LSC		week 1 February 08
outputs			
1	Interim Report		week 2 January 09
2	Final Report		week 4 March 09

## 4.2 SSCs – overview

The preparedness of each SSC for the QCF varied according to their internal capacity and previous experience. Our analysis of SB responses to the programme may suggest that larger SSCs were more prepared for the QCF and were perhaps more receptive to the Credit Works approach than smaller SSCs/Bs. Smaller SBs were faced with resource and capability issues and while they may have wished to explore new ways of working suggested, some had insufficient internal capacity to fully act on those suggestions.

However smaller and perhaps accordingly more agile SBs were sometimes able to take decisions quickly. Larger SBs working in complex sectors with a number of SB partners from culturally quite distinct 'sub-sectors', each with a range of perspectives on learning and qualifications faced a different set of challenges.

The LSC and UKCES provided helpful base line information on each SSC. Our appraisal through the Self Assessment exercise was consistent with that baseline information. SBs largely welcomed the Credit Works approach; in telephone interviews and in the seminar SSCs (whatever their level of experience) were pleased that the project would take a strategic approach to the support for development of priority qualifications for funding – the concept of a '*sector framework of units from which all QCF units and qualifications can be drawn*' was popular across experienced and less experienced SBs; Skillsmart UK suggesting that the model provided an opportunity to bring their different QCF projects together; Skills for Care and Development seeing the model as a way of bringing coherence to the plans and efforts of its UK partnership; FSSC seeing the model as supporting a strategic and systematic approach to unit and qualification development in line with its revised NOS. While the project focused on units and qualifications which met LSC priorities, SSCs understood that the skills and knowledge gained in the process were transferable and agreed that essentially all their units and qualifications ought to inter-relate within a framework where possible to maximise progression, credit accumulation and transfer.

## 4.3 Standard Setting Bodies – overview

A highly individualised approach was needed for working with each identified SSB, depending on their position.

The three SSBs identified to attend the introductory seminar on 3<sup>rd</sup> November: Council for Administration (CfA), Institute of Customer Service (ICS), and Management Standards Centre (MSC) were selected using the following criteria:

- They were responsible for developing cross sectoral units for use in number of sectors and qualifications
- Their (potential) contribution to priority qualifications for public funding
- Each had completed SQS Action Plans

In addition, as part of the self assessment process, SSCs were asked to identify any SSB which might be involved in developing their sector priority qualifications and in need of support. Credit Works then planned follow up with each identified SSB to assess the nature and volume of support required and to draw up and cost an SSB support programme accordingly. SSCs did not (through the SA exercise) identify SSBs that might contribute to the development of their sector priority qualifications.

In January 09, Credit Works agreed to undertake work with additional LSC specified SSBs and following self-assessment, worked with those SSBs on the development of specific QCF units and qualifications that are a current priority for their sector and LSC itself.

#### 4.4 SB Response

The response to the programme was almost universally enthusiastic from the outset. We knew from experience in the Fast Track programme 0809 that the packages of support and training across SBs would need to be customised and that each SB would be at different stages of development, have different levels of internal resource and capacity and face different demands and challenges in its sector.

The programme was designed to respond to individual requirements, with a CW director taking the lead on each SB programme with CW associates working to deliver training and unit/qualification development support online. We believe this model was effective and was improved by:

**The launch seminar at LSC.** This brought the (initial group of) SBs together and promoted the LSC support for and approach to the programme.

**The self-assessment exercise.** This provided a baseline of information about the SB's capacity and a record of its own view of its needs. This was a simple, confidential exercise that kept the work focused, set out an agreed plan for the programme, and allowed CW to record actions against that plan. (Use the web link on the Contents page of this report to read a summary of the Self Assessment questionnaire.)

**Identification of the SB person responsible overall for QCF qualifications development as the key contact for the programme.** This helped to ensure that responsibility for engagement with the programme was centred on the accountable person within the organisation. This meant that where the programme changed thinking in the SB (and required a different set of actions within the SB from those anticipated) that the key contact was immediately engaged in addressing those actions, or at least that a CW director could discuss any implications of the programme with the key SB person with overall responsibility. This meant that in almost all cases the nominated CW director developed a working relationship with those in authority within the SB and was able to support them where necessary in moving new ideas and approaches forward within their organisation.

**Balancing CW and SB input and output.** The responsibility for unit and qualifications development resided with the SB and its partners. The input from CW was geared to SB commitment to 2 key objectives:

- Systematic SB development of QCF units and qualifications, with timelines and a project plan, focused on priority qualifications for public funding
- Either adoption/adaptation of the CW *Process Map* to generate a 'sector relevant' framework of QCF units from which all QCF VQs could be drawn *or* an SB approach which achieved the same objective.

The *Process Map* is described in Section 3 describes this approach. Examples of practice are provided via the web link on the Contents page of this report.

This enabled CW to use the programme resources most effectively; concentrating the programme's resources where the SB was able to commit to achieving, or at least striving to achieve, these objectives. It helped to ensure that capacity was built within the SBs rather than CW undertaking tasks which should rightfully be the responsibility of the SBs and/or the awarding bodies.

A process for assigning credit and level was drafted by CW and was tested with a number of SBs. See Appendix 1.

**Dissemination: web based approaches welcomed.** Resources and time was put into these rather than seminars. There were significant benefits to being able to maintain some fluidity in communications, as SBs developed their approaches very quickly and were keen to have access to an ongoing dialogue rather than expensive 'point in time' meetings. However SBs were also looking for guidance from our team on different approaches, what constituted good practice and accurate interpretation of the regulations, and some preferred to be presented with this rather than search for ideas via the web.



## 5 Issues and analysis

### 5.1 Overview: changed economic circumstances, SSCs and their role in VQ reform

The demand for (SSC/Bs and others) to respond rapidly and effectively to changing economic demands for qualifications that recognise skills in 'more flexible ways' was articulated clearly in LSC's Statement of Priorities (SOP) 2009-2010<sup>8</sup>:

*"The QCF must support the reform of vocational qualifications, ensuring that they all have real economic value, that learners can progress through building units to gain full qualifications, and that the system is clear and simple for learners and employers to use, with clear links to Skills Accounts and the Adult Advancement and Careers Service. The Council must continue to work closely with the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, Ofqual, Awarding Bodies and Sector Skills Councils to deliver that; and to ensure that the full range of units is available from the QCF from early in the New Year."*

*"Priority 2: Improving adult skills*

*Adult skills are recognised as being vital to increasing national and international competitiveness for employers, and increasing economic and social inclusion. They are at the heart of government policy and provision is undergoing rapid, large-scale change to increase responsiveness to the needs of individuals and employers.*

***These changes have been accelerated to respond to the current economic climate, where there is a need to support employers and individuals in more flexible ways. We will not hesitate to introduce further radical reshaping of the skills system if it is needed."*** (our bold)

There are three key points here which are spelt out in the SOP:

- *Economic circumstances have changed and the process of reform needs to accelerate*
- *Flexibility is now an urgent necessity*
- *If the current system cannot deliver on that, it will also need to change, perhaps radically.*

**5.1.2 World Class Skills** Lord Leitch's recommendations<sup>9</sup> that qualifications will be more likely to deliver the skills employers need if SSCs, on behalf of employers, decide which vocational qualifications should be recognised within the new QCF in England, placed SBs in the driving seat.

SSCs will approve qualifications if they fit the requirements of their SQS, meet the standards set by their NOS, and are needed by their sectors. This has the potential to simplify radically the qualifications structures within sectors.

*"SSCs will have to develop rapidly their capacity to carry out this role well. They will need to demonstrate that their SQS and NOS reliably express employers' needs, with the flexibility to recognise differences between employers. They will*

<sup>8</sup> LSC. *Government Investment Strategy 2009–10, LSC Grant Letter and LSC Statement of Priorities.* LSC 2009.

<sup>9</sup> DIUS, *World Class Skills: Implementing the Leitch Review of Skills in England.* DIUS 2007

*need to develop light-touch, streamlined methods for approving vocational qualifications in their sector, and for working with other SSCs in approving cross-sectoral qualifications. Where new units or qualifications are developed to meet gaps and future priorities, strong collaborative partnerships will be needed between SSCs and bodies designing units and qualifications to bring them rapidly to market.” (° Leitch Review, 3.19)*

In order to deliver on the Leitch and LSC SOP aims on skills, mobility, progression and credit accumulation and transfer, SBs need a sector relevant framework of units to maximise the number of QCF pathways and qualifications (using ROC) from the minimum number of QCF units. Section 3 of this report sets out how to achieve this. An approach which looks at development (and approval) of each qualification separately will not by default produce these required benefits.

**5.1.3 SBs and AOs** SSCs, with their sector focus and responsibility, are in the best position at the moment (given the government investment in these bodies as strategic organisations) to do this. They are the only organisations which are expected to have a strategic overview of a whole sector. Awarding organisations will have an interest in parts of a sector, focused on their particular markets. Almost all the SSCs in the fast track project and all the SBs in the current LSC support programme have positioned themselves to act in this strategic way (or are trying to do so) many with the support of their associated awarding organisations; many AOs have signed up to working with SSCs in developing shared or (on terms) restricted units in the interest of removing duplication and maximising opportunities for progression through credit accumulation and transfer. It is possible to point to a growing number of SSCs now successfully working in this way. Recommendation 1 in the Fast Track report (April 08) says that SSCs need clear authority to work in this way and that performance measures should be applied to ensure they do so. There are obstacles to this and some are identified below.

**5.1.4 SB capability** The methodology needed to make this happen was developed with SSCs and AOs – and the approach met with growing support from SSCs/Bs in the support programme. We have observed marked improvement in AO relationships with SSCs and a growing clarity (where there has been clear terms for collaboration) of the role of AOs – their expertise in drafting units of assessment, developing ROC and delivering an assessment and QA service is vital.

**5.1.5 Resources for development of units and qualifications** On resources to support the development of units and qualifications, AOs realise that there are significant savings to be made on development costs if they act collectively with SBs, though this benefit is of more immediate interest to the majority of smaller AOs perhaps than to the larger ones. If SSCs are able to work successfully with AOs then costs are reduced all round.

**5.1.6 Resources for SB capacity building** If projected SSC costs for development of QCF units and qualifications seem unfeasible then these should be challenged; but there are a number of ways of reducing development costs and spreading the workload without jeopardising the progress many SSCs have made on securing buy in from AOs and others to a collaborative strategic approach to unit and qualification development.

There is a need for SBs to adopt a clear and consistent system for approving qualifications for accreditation into the QCF. If SBs work with AOs on the development of units and qualifications strategically and from the outset then formal approval can be made at the end of a development process in which the SB has played a major role; where SBs and AOs have established such working relationships this is likely to be how approval will work in practice. The clearer the

SB's view is of what qualifications are needed in its sector the more important it will be for the SB to discourage AOs from making random proposals, and for the AOs to establish early and continuous cooperation with SBs. Even though an SB could refuse approval of such proposals the process of doing so would be costly for both parties; this fact in itself should encourage SBs and AOs to cooperate on unit and qualification development from the earliest stages.

Timelines for QCF population are critical and it may be that not all SSCs are acting swiftly enough – this issue should be addressed through UKCES. However in our view those that adopt a collaborative and strategic approach are more likely to deliver on time; making effective use of resources and removing duplication of effort (as well as duplication of units and qualifications). Terms for collaboration can be used to place stronger obligation on partners (even voluntary partners) to deliver on time.

**5.1.7 Strategic steer** Changes in the roles of key government agencies, (including the establishment of the UKCES and Ofqual in 2008) meant that at times it was difficult to keep track of QCF developments (and government expectations) during the project; this made the task of keeping SBs on track more difficult.

The simple aim – development of sector relevant frameworks of units maximising from the minimum – needs an active strategic overview from the key agencies, a strong strategic steer and a great deal of cooperation across sectors if the opportunities offered by the QCF are to be fully exploited. SBs, even with all the challenges they face are still the only organisations positioned to steer delivery of properly reformed VQs.

Though the cooperation of AOs is essential to achieve this aim, AOs have commercial and competitive interests, cannot fairly be expected to act collectively although they do have a role in strategic reform when they cooperate with SBs, as very many of them now do.

## 5.2 Issues

Some issues were resolved through the programme; others were beyond our influence but should be noted for action, particularly if they pose a risk to the overall objectives of the LSC.

**5.2.3 Approvals process** In discussions with UKCES we identified three key points identified in the *Process Map* where SSCs could provide direction and so either avoid or identify potential problems with approval at later stages.

These were at the points where:

1. The SB applies partner agreed design principles for QCF units and qualifications within an overall project plan. This includes AO agreement to apply SB ROC to sector occupational qualifications.
2. The SB works with AOs and other partners using agreed MOU (including methodology) to develop units and quals. This process is reviewed on completion of draft units.
3. The SB and AOs assign credit and level to units. The suggested process Appendix 1 includes a review of unit content if necessary and adjustments to draft units, prior to approval within ROC by the SB.

**5.2.4 Scotland** Issues identified in the Fast Track 08 report seem to remain. As SBs make best use of the QCF to design new occupational qualifications there will be a divergence from the NQF N/SVQ model. It appears that some SSCs will live with this difference necessarily; their licence demands that they do, while employers operating across borders are likely to be bemused by the differences between occupational qualifications available to them. There is no reason why QCF qualifications cannot accommodate differences in demand from Scottish employers (and legislation or regulation) without having to conform to a completely different design specification.

**5.2.5 Assessment of Competence** Discussions continued across SBs on the issue of recognition of competence through qualification (with and without) use of the NVQ label/brand. We were aware that Ofqual and UKCES met with a number of SSCs to take steps to address issues of concern. This issue was cited by some (not all) SBs as an obstacle to progress on development of priority units and qualifications.

**5.2.6 Signifying when the purpose of a qualification is to signify occupational competence** Whatever the SB position on the NVQ brand/name and related regulatory requirements, SBs did and do need a way to signify when a qualification in the QCF attests to occupational competence (or steps towards it or beyond it). The Ofqual evaluation of 'qualification purpose' offers an opportunity to address this issue.

**5.2.7 Duplication of units and qualifications** Many AOs are pushing hard to get SB support to put their NQF Vocationally Related Qualifications (VRQs) into the QCF. Almost always these qualifications (across AOs) will include duplication and will not have been developed strategically to support CAT, progression and flexibility *across the sector(s)* (though some may support CAT across *an awarding organisation's qualifications* in a sector). Where SBs do not yet have a clear QCF plan in place for qualifications of *all* purposes to be brought into the QCF (using a single framework of units and ROC to design qualifications for different purposes) it is difficult for them to resist pressure to support AOs submitting their VRQs into the QCF. Where SSC/B plans are still in development they face significant pressure. On the positive side, those SBs with a plan for a sector framework in place and AO buy in, are facing fewer of these problems.

**5.2.8 Units being 'capable of separate assessment'.** The issue of the requirement to develop separate assessment instruments for each individual unit was raised by AOs. QCF regulatory arrangements state that:

*"5.3 The awarding organisation must have procedures in place to develop assessment methods for individual units, or groups of units, that:  
... enable units to be assessed individually"*

QCA guidance on unit writing (Version 3 2008) states:

*"...awarding bodies will be free to develop assessment arrangements that enable evidence from more than one unit to be generated and presented through a single process. Other awarding bodies may choose to offer assessment for the same units through different arrangements that separately assess each individual unit. Either approach is permissible within the QCF. So, for example, a large Diploma offered to full-time learners may well include assessment activities that 'wrap around' two or three units and effectively offer opportunities for 'clusters' of credits to be achieved towards the Diploma. A small Award may offer discrete assessment arrangements*

*based on each individual unit within the qualification. In both instances the units themselves may be identical.”*

Our understanding from Ofqual is that this means that whilst assessments that cover more than one unit are perfectly valid, AOs must also have mechanisms in place to allow learners to be assessed in order to gain credit on individual units too.

We understand that this regulation is there to ensure that learners are able to gain credits for individual units and accumulate and transfer these towards full qualification where this meets demand. However this regulation appears to call for *every AO to develop a separate assessment instrument for every unit it places on the QCF*. This has substantial and significant consequences which we believe could be negative. These consequences would include at least the following:

- AOs developing larger units (to avoid having to create additional assessment instruments)
- Less flexibility (larger units could impede flexibility in ROC)
- Prevent separation of skills and knowledge into separate units
- Substantial replication, as knowledge units would then have to be written separately which would overlap with units integrating skills and knowledge
- All above would hinder attempts of SSCs and others to rationalise and would reduce opportunities for credit transfer

We recommend therefore that this issue is addressed in the evaluation of the QCF in 09. Units must be *capable* of separate assessment without every AO having to develop assessment *instruments* for every QCF unit they place on the QCF.

**5.2.10 Full level 2 and 3** Delays in release of interim arrangements meant that CW had to work with general principles rather than precise requirements. We took the view that:

- If the CW *Process Map* worked then it could accommodate technically any requirement;
- That SSCs should be able to design a framework from which qualifications could be drawn that responded to employer/occupational demand and the ‘employability’ principles of full L2/3 and at the same time accommodate any credit size requirements set out by Government.

Any issues of size or other constraint could be articulated properly once the SB fully understood how to use the QCF, having explored the options fully. In our view at the time of writing, those SBs using the model we proposed were likely (with some initial guidance) to be able to:

- Meet full level 2 (FL2) requirements from their qualification plans
- Use their sector relevant framework of units to include options for acquisition and recognition of a range of skills for employability *should these be required by individual learners to succeed at Level 2*.
- Specify their own FL2 requirements for AOS and others

In principle this position would obtain for FL3.

However the small minority of SSCs/Bs wedded to replicating NOS in QCF qualifications – one QCF unit to one NOS – are more likely to struggle to

accommodate within their occupational qualifications, the personal requirements of learners that have obstacles to reaching a 'platform of employability' at FL2. The argument from such SSCs against personalising occupational qualifications is that this is *not* their purpose; however SSCs that understand how to use the QCF would be able to design qualifications that both meet occupational requirements and accommodate the learning and recognition of non-occupational skills and knowledge that might be necessary for some learners.

## 6 Recommendations

1. **We recommend that QCA and Sector Bodies consider the *Process Map* and make best use of it as a tool to support strategic sector use of the QCF.** The Process Map is not a substitute for current QCA guidance; it makes use of the guidance published at the time of writing, and helps SBs to understand *how* to make best of the QCF to meet a range of demands, addressing the key planning questions *before* the SB embarks on unit and qualification design with Awarding Organisations. There is now a real need to plot the rapidly expanding sources of guidance and examples of practice (from QCA, FAB/JCQ and the Alliance of SSCs) within a process of strategic sector development of QCF units and qualifications.
2. **We recommend that further planning tools should be developed** which would help SBs to address the key questions set out in the *Process Map* diagram in Section 3.2 of this report. These should draw on material developed for use within this project and included in this report (see Appendix 1 and web links on the Contents page). Examples of successful planning practice are now available from SBs and their associated Awarding Organisations; these should be collected and used to exemplify the planning tools developed within the QCF readiness programme.

### Discussion points for Ofqual:

1. **Consider review (within the 2009 evaluation of the QCF) of the QCF regulation which obliges awarding organisations to provide an assessment instrument for every individual QCF unit.** It should be possible to oblige awarding organisations to ensure that learners have access to assessment of an individual unit should they require it, without requiring all AOs to develop individual assessments for every unit they offer (irrespective of whether these assessments are likely to be used). This regulation could discourage AOs from developing smaller QCF units, reducing the flexibility of the offer to learners and hampering progression.
2. **It would be helpful if work on alignment of credit frameworks across the four countries of the UK focussed on the *de facto* recognition of credit values assigned to units and qualifications in each framework.** This would help to build confidence in the validity of credit values across the UK and significantly reduce bureaucracy and costs. This would improve the process of assigning credit and level to QCF units in England Wales and Northern Ireland and build confidence in credit across the UK.
3. **There is need for more work and guidance on protocols for naming qualifications linked to their purpose.** E.g., naming protocols to signify a threshold of occupational competence, recognising that what is required in terms of content and assessment for this threshold may vary within and across sectors. SSC's agreement to use a 'signifier' could be recognised as a 'quality mark' by employers.

## Appendix 1

# A suggested process for assigning credit and level to QCF units 120209

### Introduction

**NOTE:** Please reference Credit Works and the title and date of this paper if you make use of any or all of the text below. This suggested process is intended to help you address the regulatory requirements for assigning credit and level to QCF units. You are free to adapt and or adopt the suggested process as you see fit. Adoption of some or all of the suggested process by a QCF submitting organisation is not to be regarded as an endorsement by Credit Works Ltd.

This document *outlines* a process for assigning credit and level to QCF units. The process is a *suggested* one and does not have any official status. It has been developed by Credit Works as a result of discussions with sector bodies and others, and from our practice with Awarding Organisations and SSCs/Bs over a number of years, both in the CQFW and the QCF tests and trials.

It is in *outline* form only – we did not want to burden potential users with dense instructions. We expect to use this suggested process in training sessions customised to individual SSC/B requirements. Sharing ways of adapting/adopting the process should help to promote consistency among Submitting Organisations in approaches to assigning credit and level to QCF units.

We will use this suggested outline process with interested SSCs/Bs engaged in the support programme. This we hope, will generate examples of practice, case studies and pro forma, that can be shared through Forums for Learning on the Credit Works website.

The process takes into account the regulatory arrangements published by Ofqual and draws significantly on the latest (V3) published QCF guidance.<sup>10</sup> We advocate a process for assigning credit and level that is integral to the process of designing QCF units and where credit and level are examined together. Users should refer to the QCF guidance for assigning level – in particular the suggested '5 steps' to reach a decision on level and integrate these steps into the overall process for assigning credit and level.

The process we advocate takes and builds on best practice from other procedures and systems including those within the CQFW and SCQF. However awarding and submitting organisations should be aware that the specification for the SCQF is different from that of the QCF and that QCF units, qualifications and processes must meet QCF regulatory criteria.

### What's included?

These documents include:

- An introduction to the process

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<sup>10</sup> See especially, Sections 2.3 and 3.1, QCA, DCELLS, CCEA, *Guidelines for writing credit-based units of assessment for the Qualifications and Credit Framework Version 3*



- Advice on key points to remember when designing and implementing a process for your organisation
- An outline of a suggested process
- Supporting documents for implementing a process
- Sources for further information and advice

## **Purpose**

This suggested process aims to provide the basis for a robust system for assigning credit and level to QCF units that can satisfy the QCF regulatory arrangements. The process should be cost effective and provide confidence in the consistency of credits and levels across the system.

## **Key points to remember when designing and implementing your process**

### **An integrated process**

In our view, credit and level should be assigned within an overall process for designing QCF units and credit and level should be examined together. This is important for a number of reasons:

- It is not possible to be confident about the credit value of a unit unless you are clear about the level of achievement within the unit
- Poorly written learning outcomes will make it hard to determine credit value consistently
- Poorly written assessment criteria will make it hard to determine level and credit value consistently
- If qualification strategies aim to encourage “bite size” learning and promote opportunities for CAT, designing units with smaller credit values will be important

### **Key definitions**

**Credit value:** *The number of credits that may be awarded to a learner for the successful achievement of the learning outcomes of a unit*

**Learning time:** *The amount of time a learner at the level of the unit is expected to take, on average, to complete the learning outcomes of the unit to the standard determined by the assessment criteria*

### **Points to note about definitions**

- The credit value of a unit is arrived at by estimating the learning time and dividing it by 10
- Credit is awarded for achievement, not for learning effort
- It is important to emphasise that learning time is not time served, for example the number of hours a learner is rehearsing for a performance or the number of hours a learner spends training in the workplace or attending a course. It is the professional judgement on how long it will take a learner on average (at the level of the unit) to achieve a specific unit. So for example you may want to consider, on average how many hours spent

rehearsing contribute to achievement of this particular unit. [See the form for 'step 2' of the process for more examples and guidance on possible activities and how their contribution to learning time can be assessed].

- As units are developed, submitting organisations will consider how a unit's size influences the opportunities for learners to accumulate achievement flexibly
- The level of a unit is determined by reviewing the learning outcomes and assessment criteria of the unit against the level descriptors. Each unit has one level that is a constant property of the unit, irrespective of the qualification(s) within which the unit is placed.
- The level descriptors provide a general, shared understanding of learning and achievement at each of the nine levels. Those assigning credit and level should use their professional expertise to apply the level descriptors to their own subject area or context. Where appropriate, they may also use their knowledge and understanding of relevant levelling tools such as sector or subject specific descriptors.

### **Asking the right questions**

Assigning credit and level depends on professional judgement. The process therefore involves and draws upon the experience and knowledge of a range of professionals in the field to reach a judgement on the time it takes on average for learners to achieve the outcomes of a unit to the standard described by the assessment criteria. However it is important that those involved in making this judgement understand the concept of credit and the process in which they are involved. Guidance and training will be required.

In addition however it is important to ask the right questions of those involved in the process. For example, asking, *How long will it take for learners on average to prepare to be assessed against the learning outcomes and assessment criteria of this unit?*, may produce a more accurate response than asking, *How long will it take to achieve this unit?*.

### **Recording decisions**

It will be important for all organisations to develop documentation to record the process and the decisions taken. The documentation should include recording of:

- Details of the activities/events of the process
- Who was involved in what; their expertise and experience
- Information used to inform/support decisions
- Judgments and/or recommendations reached
- Decisions

## **Review**

The process will need to ensure continued accuracy and consistency in levels and credit values across units. The process should therefore include checking and comparison with other units to ensure consistency.

Review may also involve a systematic sampling and comparison of a range of units as part of a separate defined review process.

Review should also use evidence from the delivery, assessment and awarding of the unit. This information may be used as an integral part of the process, for example where units are based on existing units and qualifications in the NQF. It may also be used where appropriate as part of a separate and defined review process.

We have not suggested a process for review at this stage but suggest that a clear record of how decisions on credit and level were arrived at and (what these were informed by) will be essential for any review process to be effective.

## **A cost effective process**

It will be important that the process is both rigorous and cost effective. We have not included details of the nature/format of the process in this documentation. However whilst there will be times when face to face meetings are necessary, many of the elements in the process can be undertaken by electronic communications and virtual meetings. This is likely to be increasingly the case as experience of assigning credit and level develops, providing suitably rigorous monitoring and checks are in place.

## **Building capacity and capability**

It will be important to develop and use the experience and capability of key staff in assigning credit and level. At the same time in order to engage a wide range of expertise and to build a sustainable process, it will be equally important to continue to engage new staff/participants. We recommend that once a core capability is developed in key staff and individuals, this is constantly renewed by involving small numbers of people new to the process alongside those with more experience.

### A process for assigning credit and level to QCF units

This suggested process assumes that draft units (learning outcomes and assessment criteria) have been prepared using QCF guidance documents and the Credit Works *Process Map*.

NOTE: Users should refer to the QCF guidance for assigning level – in particular the suggested ‘5 steps’ to reach a decision on level and integrate these steps into the overall process for assigning credit and level to QCF units. This guidance also provides sample documentation for recording decisions.

This table outlines:

- steps in the process
- what supporting information you might use to inform and come to decisions on credit and level;
- and who could be involved

Steps in the process	Supporting information	Who could be involved
<p>1. Unit developers should provide an initial estimate of level and credit value of the units</p>	<p>Current QCF level descriptors and guidance.</p> <p>Identify and consider any pre-requisite skills and knowledge and make sure you exclude these from your calculations.</p> <p>Are there other units and/or qualifications to your knowledge where comparability between achievements exists? Use this information to help inform your estimate.</p> <p>Where draft units are being written from existing qualifications and/ or structured learning programmes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If the unit has been written from an existing qualification, gather information from providers/assessors/verifiers and others with relevant experience.</li> </ul> <p>If the learning associated with a structured programme gather information to help you to estimate how long the learners in this context need to achieve the learning outcomes in the unit.</p>	<p>Unit developers:</p> <p>These could be internal staff of an SSC/B, AO or any other Submitting Organisation, or external consultants. Sufficient experience and expertise on QCF necessary, with training and support available</p> <p>Whoever drafts the units should gather information from ‘subject experts’ and others as suggested in the QCF guidance.</p>
<p>2. Identifying the range of ‘typical’ learners, learning contexts</p>	<p><i>See separate form below for recording the following information and an illustrated</i></p>	<p>Employer/workplace representatives, tutors and assessors with a range of experience and perspectives, sector</p>

<p>and learning activities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Making recommendations on credit value and level for the units</li> <li>• Involving the right people in this process</li> </ul>	<p><i>example:</i></p> <p>Are there a range of 'typical' learners?</p> <p>Are there a range of corresponding learning contexts?</p> <p>Does this range mean a variation in the time it takes on average to achieve the unit?</p> <p>If so, average this out across those learners.</p> <p>For each typical learner, what learning activities do they undertake to achieve the learning outcomes and meet the assessment criteria specified in the unit?</p>	<p>body staff, awarding body professional staff, external verifiers.</p>
<p>3. Make any necessary amendments to the units resulting from the outcomes of the process so far. This might include for example, adjustments to learning outcomes, assessment criteria or unit title.</p>	<p>Recorded feedback from the process so far.</p>	<p>Submitting organisation who may or may not use unit developers for this part of the process</p>
<p>4. Review and validation of the units by the Submitting Organisation</p>	<p>Recorded outcomes from the whole process which shows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What information was used to make the initial estimate</li> <li>• Recommendations on credit value and level for the units</li> <li>• Evidence which demonstrates accuracy and consistency in levels and credit values of its</li> </ul>	<p>Responsible person in the Submitting Organisation</p>

	units, and consideration of units in comparison with other units in the unit databank	
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**Form for recording the outcomes of Step 2 in the Credit Works' suggested process for assigning credit and level to QCF units.**

**Typical Learner**

Start with identifying typical learners and contexts. There may be more than one 'typical' learner and more than one context in which people will learn and achieve the unit (see the example below). We suggest that (if necessary) you consider the range of 'typical' learners and the range of corresponding learning contexts in coming to your decision.

**Learning activities**

This list of activities is not intended to be exhaustive, you may well add some of your own or customise them to make them relevant to the range of learners and contexts you are considering. Some learning activities will not be relevant for all learners in all contexts. Learning activities must be related to learning associated with achievement of learning outcomes. Note that the all forms of assessment are included in estimating learning time.

**estimating time on average**

*The 'amount of time a learner at the level of the unit is expected to take, on average, to complete the learning outcomes of the unit to the standard determined by the assessment criteria' may vary according to learner and context. You may need to moderate your decisions; for example the dominant context and typical learner may be Typical learner A with only 10% of all learners being typified as Learner B and if need be you should moderate the learning time and 'average' accordingly.*

By 'average' here we mean an average found by determining the most frequent value in a group of values.

There is other information (and methods) that can help to inform you in estimating learning time; see the example on P31 provided in V3 of the guidance on writing units for the QCF (1. *ibid*) which shows how one Awarding Organisation '*assessed the time it would take to work through five distinct phases, which we believe are common to all our units.*'

<b>Learning Activities</b>	<b>Typical learner A (description).</b>	<b>Typical learner B (description)</b>	<b>Typical learner C (description)</b>
	<b>Example: 16-19 year old on a full time college programme with little or relevant previous knowledge or skill</b>	<b>Example: experienced older worker who has acquired most knowledge and skills informally on the job with little formal training input</b>	<b>Example: young adult learning informally in the workplace with some formal training input</b>

	<b>Insert time in hours spent having asked the question:</b> <i>How long will learners spend on average on this activity to prepare to be assessed against the learning outcomes and assessment criteria of this unit?</i>	<b>Insert time in hours spent having asked the question:</b> <i>How long will learners spend on average on this activity to prepare to be assessed against the learning outcomes and assessment criteria of this unit?</i>	<b>Insert time in hours spent having asked the question:</b> <i>How long will learners spend on average on this activity to prepare to be assessed against the learning outcomes and assessment criteria of this unit?</i>
<u>Formal learning (including classes, training sessions, coaching, seminars and tutorials)</u>			
<u>Practical work in workshops, laboratories or other locations;</u>			
<u>Relevant ICT activities</u>			
<u>Relevant information retrieval in libraries/resource facilities;</u>			
<u>Expected private study and revision</u>			
<u>Work-based activities which lead to assessment</u>			
<u>Preparatory studies, sketches, modelling</u>			
<u>Producing things</u>			
<u>Practice, gaining, applying and refining skills to achieve threshold level of competence</u>			

<p><u>All forms of assessment</u> – i.e. the time taken in engagement in assessment activity in order to generate evidence of achievement. (This could include time for gathering evidence through Initial Assessment and Ongoing Review and or RPL)</p>			
Total hours			
Average:			
Divided by 10 and rounded up or down to arrive at a credit value:			



## Appendix

### What do the Regulatory Arrangements for the QCF (2008) say?

We have identified references<sup>11</sup> to procedures for assigning credit values for QCF units as follows:

#### Introduction

##### **The design of the QCF (P5)**

All units and qualifications in the QCF have a credit value (one credit represents 10 hours, showing how much time and effort it takes to complete) and a level between Entry level and level 8 (showing the level of challenge or difficulty of it).

##### **Roles and responsibilities (P9)**

Organisations that are recognised to develop and submit units ... must have procedures in place to ensure that units are developed according to QCF specifications and have robust levels and credit values.

##### **General 1.7 (P12)**

All units must identify a credit value for the unit which specifies the number of credits that will be awarded to a learner who has achieved the learning outcomes of the unit.

This must be based on:

- a one credit for those learning outcomes achievable in 10 hours of learning
- b learning time being defined as the time taken by learners at the level of the unit, on average, to complete the learning outcomes of the unit to the standard determined by the assessment criteria
- c the credit value of the unit remaining constant regardless of the method of assessment used or the qualification(s) to which it contributes.

#### **Development**

##### 3.2 (P22)

When developing units, the organisation must have procedures in place to:

- c involve awarding organisations, where it is not itself an awarding organisation
- d ensure accuracy and consistency in the determination of levels and credit values

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<sup>11</sup> Ofqual, DCELLS, CEA Regulatory arrangements for the Qualifications and Credit Framework 2008

### **Ongoing review**

#### 3.3 (P22,23)

The organisation must have procedures in place to:

- b ensure continued accuracy and consistency in levels and credit values of its units, in particular considering units in comparison with other units in the unit databank
- c ensure the continued compliance of the unit with the requirements set out in the design features in Section 1
- d use evidence from the delivery, assessment and awarding of the unit, at appropriate times, as part of the review process.

#### 3.4 (P22, 23)

The organisation must supply information about its units, and the processes used in their development and review, to the qualifications regulators in order to support their activities to ensure consistency across units.

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# New routes into university for people working in adult social care

Progress report on the development of the Specialist Adult Social Care Pathway for Higher Apprentices in Care Leadership and Management

September 2013

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“we’re helping employers to deliver effective Apprenticeship programmes”

# Acknowledgements

## Thanks to:

- Telephone interviewees and online survey respondents
- Higher Apprenticeship project partners
- Skills for Care skills team members and other specialist staff

for responding to the survey, contributing to discussions and commenting on the draft report.

Particular thanks to Higher Apprentices, employers and learning providers who were interviewed on film. <https://vimeo.com/channels/skills4care> and <http://www.youtube.com/user/skillsforcare>. Thank you for making Skills for Care welcome and for your time, patience and invaluable contributions.

Films by Doug Smith and photographs by John Elliott.

## Friends of the Elderly

Karen Walters  
Corinne Goodson  
Barbara Carter  
Evelyn Stewart  
Noreen Ross

## Leonard Cheshire Disability Trust

Robert Hambrook

## Egalité

Katy Charles-Miller  
Gemma Wetherall

## Wirral Autistic Society

Debbie Fields  
Jamie Davies  
Sarah Nelson

## Northbrook College

Lorraine Carey

## Opps Training

Caroline Goddard

## Middlesex University

Ruth Miller



*"I got the opportunity to do the Level 5 Diploma when my HR department contacted me...and I grabbed it with both hands."*

**Evelyn Stuart, Friends of the Elderly**

# Contents

	<b>Overview</b>	<b>1</b>
1.	<b>Key achievements of the Skills for Care Higher Apprenticeship project</b>	<b>4</b>
2.	<b>Next Steps: Summary of Actions for 2013-14</b>	<b>6</b>
3.	<b>Methodology</b>	<b>9</b>
4.	<b>Higher level skills and the vision for adult social care in England</b>	<b>11</b>
5.	<b>Improving care sector participation in Higher Education</b>	<b>12</b>
6.	<b>Higher Apprenticeship in Care Leadership and Management and Skills for Care requirements for the Specialist Adult Social Care Pathway</b>	<b>15</b>
7.	<b>Analysis and actions for 2013-14</b>	<b>21</b>
	<b>Appendix 1. Survey questions and telephone/face to face prompts</b>	<b>31</b>

## ***New routes into university for people working in adult social care***

Published by Skills for Care, West Gate, 6 Grace St, Leeds LS1 2RP [www.skillsforcare.org.uk](http://www.skillsforcare.org.uk)

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Ref: QT036

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Bibliographic reference data for Harvard-style author/date referencing system:

Short reference: Skills for Care [or SfC] 2013

Long reference: Skills for Care, *New routes into university for people working in adult social care*. (Leeds, 2013)  
[www.skillsforcare.org.uk](http://www.skillsforcare.org.uk).

# Overview

**This report describes how new routes to University have been opened up for people working as managers and specialists in Adult Social Care. Under the Skills for Care Higher Apprenticeship Framework in Care Leadership and Management, 80 credits from the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) level 5 Diploma<sup>1</sup> now count directly towards University Diplomas at Level 5.**

**This has been a ground-breaking development in Higher Apprenticeships, using credit transfer to open up access to Higher Education<sup>2</sup> to experienced workers and recently qualified Advanced Apprentices. For new recruits to the sector the potential to eventually progress into Higher Education (HE) from achievement of Apprenticeship qualifications at levels 2 and 3 will be visible right from the start of their career.**

**This report explains how Skills for Care has worked with Further Education (FE) and Higher Education (HE), learning providers and employers to create these opportunities. It describes what has been achieved so far and outlines actions planned by Skills for Care for 2013-14.**

## **Skills for Care Higher Apprenticeship in Care Leadership and Management Project**

The Skills for Care Higher Apprenticeship (HA) project - funded by the Department of Business Innovation and Skills through the National Apprenticeship Service (NAS) - ran from June 2012 to March 2013. Skills for Care planned to put a Higher Apprenticeship Framework (HAF) in place as soon as possible, starting with a General Adult Social Care Pathway built around the QCF Level 5 Diploma. Skills for Care then planned to develop a second Specialist Pathway with progression into mainstream Higher Education. Employers, FE and HE provider partners were ready to support the development and implementation of the Framework. There were obstacles that needed to be overcome in the approval process due to the nature of this approach. Despite this, the project met its objectives and all of its targets - and continues to grow in 2013-14.

## **SASE 2013**

Skills for Care has now reviewed the Higher Apprenticeship in Care Leadership and Management in the light of the revised [SASE<sup>3</sup>](#) issued in March 2013. In April and May 2013, Skills for Care undertook a detailed consultation exercise with key Apprentice Employer Champions; received 65 employer responses to an open online questionnaire; held a consultation meeting with a further group of key care sector employers. Skills for Care asked which job roles were best suited to the two pathways in the framework and if there were other job roles which should be considered and asked for feedback on the outcomes and actions in this report. The results showed that employers supported the actions proposed, that the two HA pathways suited people in the roles described, with the Specialist Pathway suited to those in more strategic and or specialist positions in an organisation.

<sup>1</sup> QCF Level 5 Diploma in Leadership for Health and Social Care and Children and Young People's Services (England)

<sup>2</sup> 'Higher Education' means any learning provision or qualifications offered at Level 4 and above in the QCF and HEQF, wherever provided.

<sup>3</sup> Specification Of Apprenticeship Standards For England (SASE), March 2013

At this point Skills for Care took the decision to ensure that both pathways met the SASE 2011 requirements and the framework was issued by Skills for Care and Development.

At the time of writing, Skills for Care is currently scoping how further revisions will ensure SASE 2013 compliance is achieved. The reviewed (SASE 2013) HA Framework will be in place for use by April 2014.

### **Future-proofing the Higher Apprenticeship in Care Leadership and Management**

The HA in Care Leadership and Management has been a significant success for the adult social care sector. However, there are significant changes afoot in the world of publicly funded education and adult social care that will have an influence on Higher Apprenticeships in Social Care and Health in the next five years. Current factors include:

- Changes in SFA funding of [24+ learning](#) from August 1 2013.
- Outcomes of the [Richard Review of Apprenticeships](#).
- The new [Apprenticeship Bill](#) and further changes in Apprenticeship funding.
- Outcomes of the [Cavendish Review](#) and the [Francis report](#).

Changes resulting from one or more of the above can cause some uncertainty about investment in HAs by employers and providers, at a time when Skills for Care is encouraging take up and expansion. However, the Skills for Care approach is to work with employers to ensure they get what they need from qualifications, and then to build Apprenticeships around qualifications which belong to and are respected by the sector. The success of the HA in Care Leadership and Management is underpinned by employer involvement in design and take up of the QCF Level 5 Diploma. FE and HE providers respect this qualification and understand that Skills for Care's close working relationship with employers validates the design plans for qualifications and Apprenticeships. The QCF Level 5 Diploma was designed from the outset to dovetail into qualifications across countries and across disciplines and sectors.

To achieve this, Skills for Care:

- Consulted with employers extensively and in detail on the development of QCF qualifications and Apprenticeships across England.
- Worked with UK partners to carefully dovetail the qualifications across disciplines in adult social care, care of children and health - to increase the scope for credit transfer, progression and mobility within and across disciplines and the social care and health sectors. Each UK country operates within different legislation and rules for the care of children and adults. However the sector body partners within Skills for Care and Development have worked together to devise units, pathways and qualifications which dovetail together as far as possible, to improve mobility across borders and professions.
- Built Apprenticeship Frameworks in England *around* these new qualifications.
- Worked with the issuing authority to ensure its plans meet sector requirements and SASE regulations.

The due diligence applied to the development of qualification and Apprenticeship design has been recognised by employers. The numbers of registrations for certification has increased by 50% since the development project ended in March 2013, with almost 500 Higher Apprentices registered by September 2013.

Through the HA, new routes to University for people working adult social care have been established and are set to grow. Employers in the sector will expect these new routes to University qualifications to adapt to changes in adult social care as they filter through. The sector will expect to use these routes to develop the skills of new managers and specialists as the adult social care sector expands in the years to come.



# 1. Key achievements of the Skills for Care Higher Apprenticeship project

- A Higher Apprenticeship Framework in Care Leadership and Management has been developed by Skills for Care for the adult social care sector in England. The General Adult Social Care Pathway was put in place in December 2012.
- 6 qualifications were designed and validated for the Specialist Adult Social Care Pathway by March 31 2013. All include a validated credit transfer arrangement which counts the 80 credits from the Level 5 Diploma directly toward the University qualification at level 5. One way Higher Apprenticeships are meant to encourage progression is through recognition of prior learning (RPL). The Skills for Care approach using credit transfer meant RPL was used systematically and consistently across HE providers.

<b>Middlesex University</b>	<p>Higher Diploma Professional Practice in leading and Managing Care Services (Dementia Care)</p> <p>Higher Diploma Professional Practice in leading and Managing Care Services (End of Life Care)</p> <p>Higher Diploma Professional Practice in leading and Managing Care Services (Business, Quality and Service Improvement)</p>
<b>University College Birmingham</b>	Professional Diploma in Care Leadership and Management (Business Development and Enterprise)
<b>University of Chichester</b>	<p>Diploma in Professional Practice in Social Care (Business &amp; Enterprise)</p> <p>Diploma in Professional Practice in Social Care (Dementia)</p>

- The *Working Specification for the Development of options for the Specialist Adult Social Care Pathway* ('the Specification') was designed by Skills for Care in consultation with HE partners and put in use by HE provider partnerships by December 2012<sup>4</sup>.
- Over 45 events supporting the roll-out of Higher Apprenticeships were organised around the country. The role of area officers was crucial in identifying themes for discussions and the right audiences.
- 11 learning providers were contracted to deliver 325 HA starts by March 31 2013.

<sup>4</sup> The Specification has been updated in the light of outcomes from the HA project and action research. An updated version of the Specification can be found on the Skills for Care website [HA page](#).

- 12 learning providers (including 10 new to the project) were contracted to develop new provision and deliver a further 312 HA starts between March 2013 and March 2014.
- 325+ Higher Apprentices starts were registered on ACE by end of March 2013.
- The results of this project were presented at a Skills for Care and Skills for Health joint national conference – *New routes into university for people working in adult social care* - in London on 11 March 2013.

The Skills for Care Higher Apprenticeship project developed rapidly. Building on the success of Skills for Care's qualification strategy, the already strong take up of the Level 5 Diploma in 2011-12 gave the HA project a head start.

This momentum was used to launch a successful model for the HA Framework in Care Leadership and Management. Strong demand and employer support for the Level 5 Diploma made it possible to take a proactive approach in developing a model for the design of the Specialist Adult Social Care Pathway and include a credit transfer arrangement as an RPL requirement, a given, for all HE providers seeking to develop options for the pathway.

Other factors were important and influential. The rising status of Higher Apprenticeships, the need to offer value for money work based learning in FE and HE and the reform of the supply side of HE provision have all been important drivers for acceptance of the Skills for Care HA model.

### **Next Steps – Actions in 2013-14**

However, there is much more to do. Many Higher Apprentices in all areas of the country will be interested in following the Specialist Adult Social Care Pathway. More HE provider partners will need to be brought on board to enable all potential higher apprentices to have equal access.

Skills for Care will continue to work to extend the range and scope of Higher Education opportunities, across England and across different specialisms in social care, according to demand identified by employers in the sector.

A systematic approach to building capacity and provision is needed, making use of the Skills for Care infrastructure of area networks and 35 area officers working in teams across the country, to build on existing relationships locally - and create new ones. Skills for Care area networks and officers can help identify and support potential HE FE partnerships, supply intelligence and employer contacts and contribute to pathway development and validation of options.

There are a number of questions that need to be addressed to ensure the Specialist Adult Social Care Pathway options are designed and offered consistently across the country. High quality provision should be identified and highlighted and this means gathering examples of innovation and good practice in module design, teaching, learning and assessment, including RPL.

Costs will vary and learners and employers should know what these are and what kind of service and support they should expect when they make their choices.

Higher Apprenticeship champions should be identified to promote inward progression to HAs and exemplify the onward progression possibilities for others. The potential for the development of level 6 and 7 qualifications and Higher Apprenticeships will be investigated.

## 2. Next Steps: Summary of Actions for 2013-14

**Skills for Care will** ensure SASE 2013 compliance is achieved. The reviewed (SASE 2013) HA Framework will be in place for use by April 2014.

Furthermore **Skills for Care will:**

### **Develop the Specialist Adult Social Care Pathway:**

1. Review the Specialist Adult Social Care Pathway options on offer and identify their 'reach' across England.
2. Identify which pathway options are priority for development and where they should be offered.

Work with HE providers to:

- i. Produce a design template for modules within the HE Specialist Adult Social Care Pathway.
- ii. Determine how Specialist Adult Social Care Pathway options can be customised for learners while maintaining consistency and coherence.
- iii. Agree the best way for pathway option developers to present evidence that module content takes account of appropriate Skills for Care reference points.

### **Build partnerships to reach learners and employers**

3. Use Skills for Care area networks to identify and share examples of successful partnerships between employers and providers.
4. Use Skills for Care area networks to develop further HA/HE engagement with employers and providers and to facilitate and broker new partnerships for provision.
5. Through project partners, test the viability, strengths and weaknesses of the franchise model in the next phase of the project 2013-14.

### **Job roles and Higher Apprentices**

6. Identify the most effective ways of using filmed learner profiles (and stills with quoted text) in promoting HAs to potential learners and employers and making best use of the whole resource for internal development and external promotion.

### **The Higher Apprenticeship learning journey – when and how do HAs decide to follow the Specialist Adult Social Care Pathway?**

7. Consider how HAs are alerted to, informed and guided about opportunities to follow the Specialist Adult Social Care Pathway.

8. Identify the guidance given to HAs to help them choose a suitable Specialist Adult Social Care Pathway.



*“The [managers following an HA] are basically biting our hand off! They really want to do this [Specialist] Pathway. We need an equitable strategy so it is fair to everyone... we have to think about the changing needs of the business ... the [current] choice of options looks quite useful ... but a year down the line, do we want ten more people doing the same thing? The [Specialist] Pathway needs to continuously evolve like our learners do... to meet all the changes that are coming on board.”*

**Karen Walters, Friends of the Elderly**

### **Progression**

9. Examine the relationship between Access to HE qualifications (in England) in health and social care and the Advanced and Higher Apprenticeships in Adult Social Care and scope potential for improving inward progression.

10. Examine potential progression from the HA in Care Leadership and Management into Social Work and alignment with the development of the Continuing Professional Development Framework and Professional Capabilities Framework.

11. Investigate the potential for the development of level 6 and 7 qualifications and Higher Apprenticeships in adult social care.

### **Assessment**

12. Identify examples of innovative and positive assessment practice which exemplifies Skills for Care and Development assessment principles and share with other HA providers.

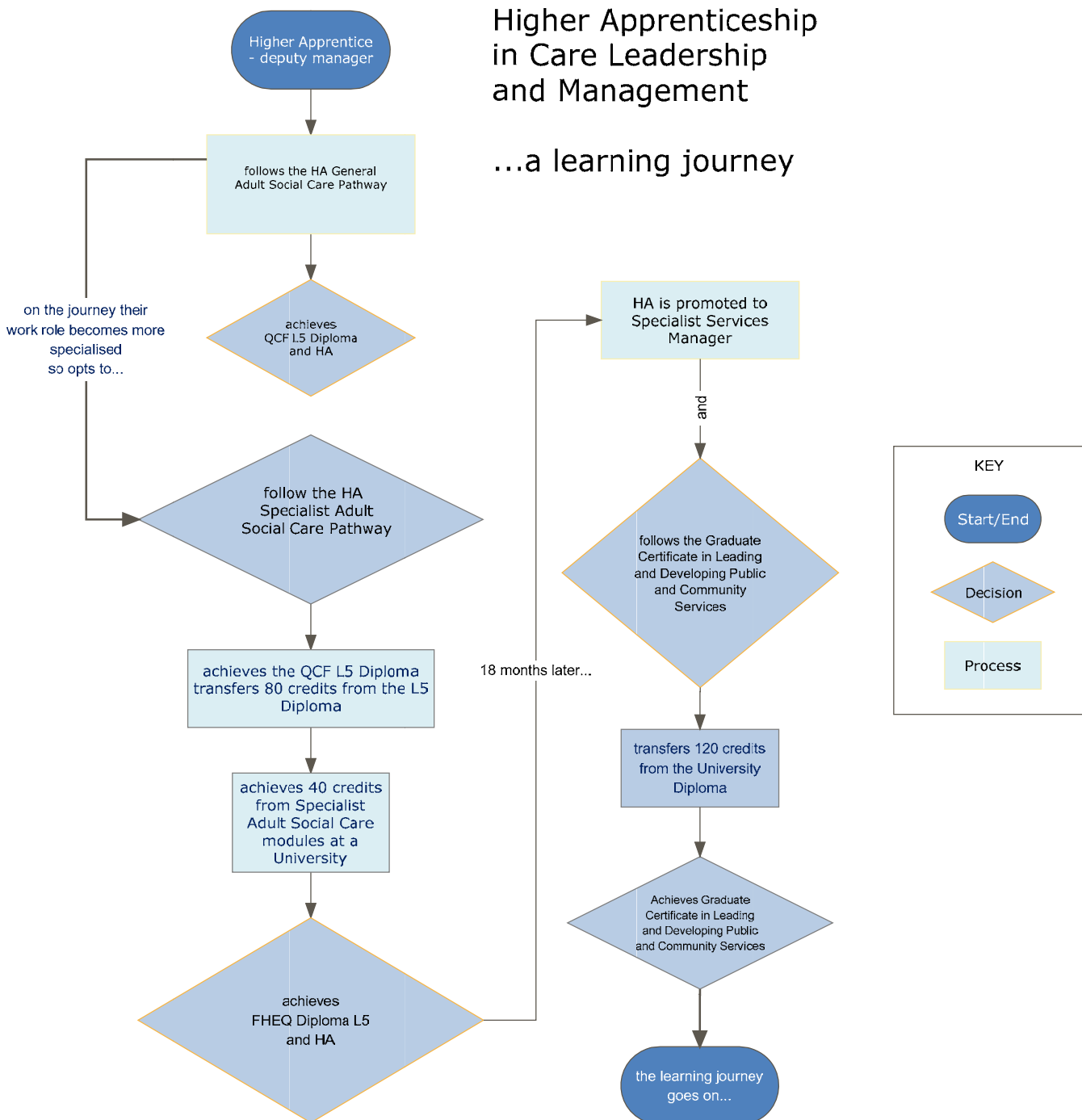
*“Helped to focus on what I do well -  
and what I need to work on...  
the skills I need to gain -  
and the opportunity to reflect on what I do...”*

**Jamie Davies, Wirral Autistic Society**



## Higher Apprenticeship in Care Leadership and Management

...a learning journey



## 3. Methodology

The process of action researching the project to develop Specialist Adult Social Care Pathway options for the HAF has been both intensive and productive. The action research approach will be adopted for the next stage of the project, to address or follow up many of the 'next steps' identified in this report and to continue to gather data from learners on their progress, and from employers and providers to inform development of the framework

### **Action research and the Higher Apprenticeship project**

Between December 2012 and March 2013 Skills for Care conducted initial action research on its National Apprenticeship Service (NAS) funded Higher Apprenticeship project.

Skills for Care decided to take an action learning approach which means that information was gathered and analysed during the process of change from those who were actively participating so that learning could be shared.

Skills for Care primary interest was in action – getting up to 325 HAs started on their programmes and putting in place the Higher Apprenticeship Framework i.e. the General Adult Social Care Pathway and a range of options for the Specialist Adult Social Care Pathway. The intention was to examine how this had worked to date, seek to capture what those involved had learned and share this internally and externally.

### **Research methods**

A combination of methods was used; desk research, online surveys, telephone/face to face film interviews of partners, employers and Higher Apprentices. HE provider responses to the 'specification' were also analysed. See *Appendix 1* for details, question sets and prompts used in film and telephone interviews and in on line surveys.

### **Action research outputs**

This report – which summarises what the project has achieved so far, next steps for HAF development at Skills for Care and offers some wider lessons for sector development of HAs in partnership with Higher Education.

Filmed case studies and clips - to provide a snapshot of the key learning points from the project, to be used for external promotion to employers and learners, and for internal Skills for Care staff development. 11 HAs and their employers were interviewed using the questions from the relevant online survey as prompts. The interviewer/researcher met and talked to users of care services. One group of (HA) managers came together to discuss their learning with providers and their employer. The points made in all discussions have helped to inform the development.

### **Conference in Apprenticeships week: March 11 2013**

*New routes into university for people working in adult social care – high level skills for the care sector – helping the care sector build business*

This conference was held on the first day of National Apprenticeship Week, and included speakers Vince Cable MP, Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills, and Lord Earl Howe, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health.

Skills for Health gave an overview of the work they were doing to increase the quality and take up of Apprenticeships and an update on developments to introduce Higher Apprenticeships into the sector. There were also contributions by health and social care apprentices.

The [conference](#) was intended to show how Skills for Care's innovative approach to the development of Higher Apprenticeships had been adopted by higher education providers and (using Skills for Care film clips) how HAs, employers and providers viewed the opportunity to follow a Higher Apprenticeship and progress to University.

Skills for Care and Skills for Health invited delegates from universities, mixed economy colleges and employers from the health and social care sectors who have been involved in driving forward the HA project and in Apprenticeships in health and social care more generally.



*“At the moment... I am learning about conflict resolution and it's really helping me to move from sitting on the fence... to becoming active in resolving conflicts in the home.”*

**Corinne Goodson, Friends of the Elderly**

## 4. Higher level skills and the vision for adult social care in England

### Vision

Adult social care is evolving rapidly. The movement towards personalised services has led to the workforce, employers, commissioners, carers and people who use services interacting in many creative ways. The coming years must see an acceleration of these changes.

The Coalition Government has set out its ambition to reinvigorate the roles and relationships of citizens – as people who use services, carers and the public – with service providers, people who work in social care and society. The case for fundamental reform of the social care system is laid out in the government’s White Paper [‘Caring for our Future’](#). This aims to bring about more integrated, community-based and innovative solutions, which in themselves require more flexible partnerships between people, their families, communities and those providing services. There will be a demand for an even more capable, responsive, skilled, well-trained and empowered workforce.

### Higher skills and the care workforce

The government’s strategy to reform the skills system, [Skills for Sustainable Growth](#) (DBIS 2010), sets out the vision to address the skills of workforces across sectors, the performance of the economy and engagement in learning. Workforce development will be increasingly important in ensuring business sustainability. New learning delivery models will emerge and begin to compete in an increasingly diverse market. Maintaining business sustainability and developing new business opportunities will require new thinking, leadership, service innovation and employers’ investment in a workforce that is capable of delivering as the market develops. Greater emphasis will be placed on highlighting the individual and business benefits of engaging in learning, skills development and undertaking qualifications that fit real business need. Investment by businesses in employees, and learners investing in their own education, will be more important than ever as will be the ability to identify return on investment.

With a drive for the development of a greater proportion of higher level skills, further expansion of provision is expected. At the same time, the costs of learning in FE and HE are set to rise for employers and individuals

*“A really good idea... it inspires people to go into higher education whereas I didn’t get many qualifications when I was younger... For me to be able to go and do that at university would be a great achievement and therefore my children would want to go to university... it would inspire them to do different things...”*





## 5. Improving care sector participation in Higher Education

### Introduction

The adult social care Workforce Development Strategy '*Capable, Confident, Skilled*' May 2011 included the following deliverable in relation to qualifications: *The development of a higher education (HE) strategy to ensure progression from vocational qualifications and closer links between the needs of employers and qualifications offered by HE.* Skills for Care principles for working in HE<sup>5</sup> underpin development and continued activity taking place in 2012-13; in particular, the implementation of the Skills for Care Higher Apprenticeships project.

### Higher level qualifications in care currently available

120+ new units (in care related learning) are now available in the QCF at level 4 and above. They offer an invaluable set of benchmarks around which Specialist Adult Social Care Pathway higher learning can be developed, having been subject to extensive consultation to ensure that they match current work expectations and job roles.

Higher level units are selected and combined within the following qualifications:

- Level 5 Diploma in Leadership for Health and Social Care and Children and Young People's Services - which contains three possible qualification pathways: Management of Adult Services; Management of Adult Residential Services; Advanced Practice in Adult Services.
- Diplomas at Level 5 and 7 in Commissioning, Procurement and Contracting for Care Services.
- Level 5 Certificate in Leading and Managing Services to Support End of Life and Significant Life Events.

### Skills for Care and Foundation Degrees

Skills for Care established relationships with HE providers through the Foundation Degree Forward (fdf) project in 2008-10.

The Skills for Care strategy for HA development learned from the fdf project. The QCF is now populated and the care sector's occupational qualifications are now in place. The take up of these (3000+ learners on the Level 5 Diploma in 2011-12) and their credentials as employer led-qualifications has allowed Skills for Care to push for and establish much more straightforward credit transfer (exemption) arrangements with HEIs wishing to develop Specialist Adult Social Care Pathway options for the Skills for Care HA. The principle – that the sector qualification is the benchmark by which HE qualifications in care are judged – is an important one for work with HEIs in the future. The guarantee of acceptance of the QCF level 5 diploma as counting toward an HE qualification at face value, has been an important goal for the HA project. All HEI contracted partners have accepted this arrangement.

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<sup>5</sup> A SfC event (March 2012) attracted 45 HE provider representatives who affirmed their support for Sfc's draft HE principles and confirmed that they provided the basis for further positive work together in 2012 /13 and would assist Sfc to better serve the needs of the sector, both employers and individuals.

By setting out the Skills for Care stall for HAs using a specification (below), HE providers are working to a consistent design plan. While not prescriptive, the specification is designed to encourage consistency and coherence – but not uniformity - in curriculum design.

One of the tasks of the HA project is to ‘review’ the FDs on offer in the light of HA development. However HEIs offering FDs are already asking for advice on how to take account of HA developments in planning their provision; this is a healthy indication that the supply side in HE recognises the need to relate their plans to the Skills for Care HAF. If design of Specialist Adult Social Care Pathway options for the HA continues to prove successful, this is perhaps likely to have an impact on the FD offer.

The HA offers a more flexible route into University than the FD in the adult social care sector and a recognised occupational qualification at its core. Credit transfer reduces fee costs significantly and the milestone HE qualification of 120 credits at level 5 is half the size of the FD. Progression from the HA can lead straight to a Graduate Certificate at level 6.

*“While I’m in that learning mode I need to keep the momentum going... doing the dementia module very much fits in with my role... and I can then pass that knowledge onto the staff.”*

**Barbara Carter, Friends of the Elderly**



## Credit Transfer

The HE White Paper *‘Students at the Heart of the system’* June 2011, reinforced the intention to open up the delivery of higher vocational education to providers of all types, including FE and independent providers. Among other policy aspirations, further competition is intended to drive down costs – a key driver for change in FE and HE over the next five to ten years.

How can employers and learners be encouraged to support and take up higher learning, if the costs of doing so is about to escalate? In addition to competition, one approach is to try to make FE and HE qualifications systems more responsive to demand and offer better value for money. New Challenges New Chances<sup>6</sup> (NCNC) emphasised the need to make progression routes to higher education from apprenticeships, vocational and professional qualifications clearer and more easily navigable. NCNC recognises, for example, the need to increase credit accumulation and transfer (CAT) opportunities across further and higher education so that higher level achievements from QCF qualifications start to count directly towards Level 5 FHEQ qualifications offered by HEIs. In 2012-13 BIS is funding a number of small pilot projects intended to develop CAT across FE and HE.

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<sup>6</sup> New Challenges, New Chances: Further Education and Skills Reform Plan: Building a World-Class Skills System (BIS, 1 December 2011)

Skills for Care has designed credit transfer into the Specialist Adult Social Care Pathway for Higher Apprenticeships in Care Leadership and Management to secure direct progression from FE to University for people working in care.

### **Recognising Prior Learning**

The Skills Funding Agency has encouraged the development and use of robust and imaginative ways of Recognising Prior Learning (RPL), particularly for experienced workers that have acquired important skills and knowledge informally at work and who may have no formal recognition of those achievements. Skills for Care is examining the scope for further improvements to RPL with HE and FE learning providers delivering HAs, in the interests of equity and fairness for learners and employers and proper support of progression in FE and HE.



*“The point of doing the HE pathway on top of the diploma... would be to progress and not just stay stuck...”*

**Katy Charles-Miller - Egalité**

## 6. Higher Apprenticeship in Care Leadership and Management and Skills for Care requirements for the Specialist Adult Social Care Pathway

*“Going to university... was something I would never achieve, never get to, not having a background of doing anything like that... I just felt that it was beyond me. But now I think it’s achievable – it’s not a pipe dream any more.”*

**Corinne Goodson, Friends of the Elderly**



This section of the report describes Skills for Care requirements for HE providers designing Specialist Adult Social Care Pathway options.

These requirements were incorporated into a *Working Specification: Skills for Care Higher Apprenticeship pathways<sup>7</sup> in Higher Education*. HE provider partners were consulted in the process of development.

HE providers each produced (by December 20 2012) a draft response to the specification which outlined their plans and intentions. These were reviewed and an overall commentary produced and used as the basis for a follow up telephone interview with each provider.

The ‘Specification’ is in two sections.

### **Section 1:**

Background - describes the Skills for Care HA Framework and provides outline information for HE providers planning to design Specialist Adult Social Care Pathway options.

### **Section 2:**

Specification - sets out (in a pro forma for completion), the requirements for HE providers planning to design Specialist Adult Social Care Pathway options and the information that they need to supply to Skills for Care for their plans to be approved. Initial guidance is supplied in this section. Skills for Care may develop further guidance as needed as the HA project progresses.

The reader will see in Section 2 that there are some ‘givens’ – these are expectations that providers need to meet to fulfil Skills for Care requirements.

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<sup>7</sup> During the project it was decided to offer one Specialist Adult Social Care Pathway in the Skills for Care – originally Skills for Care had planned to view each offer from each HE as a separate pathway within the Skills for Care HAF. However we found this would have made the process of adding Skills for Care HAF pathways to the Apprenticeship Frameworks Online database (AFO) protracted and time consuming and over time would have overly complicated the framework. It was decided to add one HE pathway to the Skills for Care HAF and regard and register each HE offer as an option within that pathway.

Completed specifications have provided a rich source of baseline data for Skills for Care in action researching the HA project. This is a working specification; Skills for Care worked with HE provider pathway option designers to test the specification and the HA pathway development process.<sup>8</sup> The intention is to use the tested specification with other HE providers interested in designing Specialist Adult Social Care Pathway options.

A Higher Apprenticeship in Care Leadership and Management may be achieved through either:

**The HA General Adult Social Care Pathway:** Achievement of the QCF Level 5 Diploma in Leadership for Health and Social Care and Children and Young People's Services (England). This qualification requires achievement of a minimum of 80 QCF credits.

or

**The Specialist Adult Social Care Pathway:** As well as taking the General Adult Social Care Pathway, learners have the option to take the Specialist Adult Social Care Pathway in an area of specialist care knowledge, or in enterprise skills and achieve a FHEQ Diploma at level 5 (120 FHEQ credits).

Those taking the Specialist Adult Social Care Pathway can gain an 'exemption', effectively transfer the 80 credits from the Level 5 Diploma in the General Adult Social Care Pathway and undertake specialist modules with a value of 40 FHEQ credits to gain a university qualification at level 5. They can then, if they choose, use the 120 credits gained to progress onto other university qualifications at degree and graduate level.

### **Learning to Learn in HE skills**

These skills will be needed by many HAs pursuing the Specialist Adult Social Care Pathway in HE. FE and HE providers will need to support learners that need these skills, but credits for these will not be counted within the Specialist Adult Social Care Pathway towards achievement of the FHEQ L5 Diploma or HA. This is to preserve the comparative value of the HA across HE awards. Learning to Learn in HE skills will be needed by some learners unfamiliar with the culture of learning and assessment in HE. They may need to develop skills in research and independent study and in presenting and writing for HE. A university may well award credit for achievements in learning to learn skills which can count towards a range of other University qualifications.

### **Who are adult social care HAs for?**

Higher Apprenticeship Frameworks must define the work role and functions of those achieving them.

**General Adult Social Care Pathway** is for those responsible for:

- Management of day to day provision in a residential service as an assistant manager, deputy, unit or service manager. This may include responsibility as Registered Manager of the service.

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<sup>8</sup> The Specification has been updated in the light of outcomes from the HA project and action research. An updated version of the Specification can be found on the Skills for Care website [HA page](#).

- Management of day to day provision in a service that is not residential. (e.g. Domiciliary Care, Day Service) They could be an assistant manager, deputy, unit or service manager. Their duties may include responsibility as Registered Manager of the service.

and

- Those within adult social care services that need a high level of knowledge of care provision activities or a specific specialism. They are not involved in direct management of staff but have some responsibility for assessment of individuals' needs to ensure positive outcomes.

**The Specialist Adult Social Care Pathway** is for those responsible for:

- Managing specialist adult social care services, with a specialist knowledge of particular adult social care provision and requirements; for example responsibility for strategic planning of dementia care across a service.
- Business development in adult social care; taking an enterprise/business development role which involves managing a business on behalf of others and/or starting and growing a new business and/or developing an existing business and/or supporting an employer to achieve any of these objectives.

### **Which Specialist Adult Social Care Pathway options should be developed?**

At the outset of the project Skills for Care had indicated from its own research which Specialist Adult Social Care Pathway options would be of likely interest to employers. These were in:

- enterprise/business development
- dementia
- end of life
- learning disabilities
- autism
- sensory impairment.

*"It allows you to find out what you are really interested in... you can find out your niche or your specialism..."*

**Robert Hambrook, Leonard Cheshire Disability Trust**



It was assumed by Skills for Care that it was not possible to develop further pathway options in all these areas by March 2013. HE partners were expected to make a business case for the development of options for the Specialist Adult Social Care Pathway - and would need to make a case to their own institution themselves anyway. Skills for Care interest is in what employers want but also in how employers expressed demand - and how HE providers choose to respond to it.

### **Progression: where could the Skills for Care HA pathway in HE lead?**

For experienced workers, the Specialist Adult Social Care Pathway offers the chance to enhance the skills and knowledge they need to progress in their careers, as managers and or specialists, and count credit from their learning at work towards HE qualifications.

For new recruits interested in Intermediate and Advanced Apprenticeships in care, the Skills for Care HA pathway in HE shows that there is clear access to a wide range of HE qualifications; and these potential routes to higher learning and qualifications will be visible right from the start of their career.

For everyone in the sector working towards the Level 5 Diploma, the Specialist Adult Social Care Pathway offers the possibility of going on to achieve a range of other HE qualifications in the future.

All HE providers offering the Specialist Adult Social Care Pathway provide learners with information about how they can use the credits they achieve through their HA towards achievement of one or more further qualifications in higher education. The potential for the development of level 6 and 7 qualifications and Higher Apprenticeships in adult social care will be investigated in 2013-14.

### **How are Specialist Adult Social Care Pathway options defined and structured?**

- The content of each unit/module must be consistent with the reference point identified by Skills for Care; e.g. National Occupational Standards (NOS), a QCF unit, a code of practice, legislation. Reference points are set out in an Appendix to the Specification. Examples are provided by Skills for Care and developers are guided on how these are used in devising Specialist Adult Social Care Pathway options. The examples given are not exhaustive; developers are encouraged to supply further reference points they have identified and used.
- 'Consistency' is required to ensure equivalence of learning and achievement across HE provider partners – units and modules may be designed in different ways to meet Skills for Care agreed reference points.

### **Specialist Adult Social Care Pathway options: curriculum content**

The intention is to make the content of each Specialist Adult Social Care Pathway option as transparent as possible, without prescribing how learners must be taught, or how they will achieve their qualification, or (beyond adhering to the sector's published assessment principles – see below) how they will have their achievements assessed. Pathway option designers are asked to explain why content has been selected and identify the reference points used in option design.

The National Skills Academy for Social Care has launched a Leadership Qualities Framework at the request of the Department of Health. The framework emphasises how all who work in social care can demonstrate leadership in what they do and how greater emphasis on empowering front line workers, people who use support and communities can improve the quality and experience of care. Specialist Adult Social Care Pathway option developers are required to take account of the Leadership Qualities Framework where it is relevant to pathway option development.

Their plans should also take account of what is already in place in sector qualifications in the QCF, avoid duplication of learning and assessment and build in progression from any relevant learning at the same or at lower levels in any of the QCF sector qualifications. Designers are also asked to explain how people who use services have contributed to curriculum content, whether directly and/or through partners in the project.

### **Specialist Adult Social Care Pathway options: consistent design principles and boundaries**

The intention is to ensure that HE providers designing Specialist Adult Social Care Pathway options share basic design principles and work within some boundaries in order to ensure a measure of consistency across Pathway options, while not being entirely prescriptive. Units/modules will be grouped and learners allowed to select according to their learning needs, the role they expect to fulfil on completion of the Specialist Pathway and onward progression to further HE qualifications. A learner may wish to pursue the QCF Level 5 Diploma and Specialist Adult Social Care Pathway concurrently; the HE provider offer to learners should make this possible.

#### **Key design principles to be followed:**

- The award of an FHEQ Diploma (or equivalent, with a value of 120 credits) at level 5 by a specified HE provider, where the learner is granted exemption of 80 HEI credits for the achievement of the QCF Level 5 Diploma in Leadership for Health and Social Care and Children and Young People's Services (England) and achieves 40 FHEQ credits at level 5 for achievement of approved Specialist Adult Social Care Pathway modules, in either specialist areas of care or in enterprise/business development.<sup>10</sup>
- Minimum size for each pathway option will be 40 HEI credits. If a learner achieves more HEI credits these should count towards HEI qualifications beyond their target HA qualification.
- Specialist Adult Social Care Pathway option modules/units must be at level 5. HA job roles are defined for each pathway and these are also a key reference point for programme design.
- Employer support/evidence of demand locally/regionally will be needed and will help in providing a rationale for programme design and each pathway option offered.
- Enterprise/Business Development – these are well defined by SFEDI NOS and QCF units. These are offered as a reference point.

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<sup>10</sup> Technically this is not a credit transfer arrangement – there are two credit systems operating in England, one in the QCF and one in the FHEQ. However HEIs are able to grant exemptions to those holding appropriate qualifications. Exemption should not be granted on a case by case basis but offered to any learner that has achieved the QCF Level 5 Diploma in Leadership for Health and Social Care and Children and Young People's Services (England).



## Information for learners and employers

Skills for Care would like to see some consistency in the messaging to learners interested in or following the Specialist Adult Social Care Pathway to a HA. Information should include:

- Simple information on the Specialist Adult Social Care Pathway including all options - using graphic illustrations as well as text.
- Arrangements for initial assessment and on-going review.
- What job role/function the HA route to HE will prepare the learner for.
- The provider approach to teaching learning and assessment.
- Scope for RPL (in addition to the credit transfer/exemption arrangements outlined).
- Onward progression routes.
- Full information for learners on all costs.



*“I try more to lead than just to manage the staff now... to get them to take ownership of what they’re doing... and to lead others as well. Before I started the Diploma I would have said my management style was one of ‘leadership’ but it probably was not... I could see the bigger picture and I expected people to fall in with that.”*

**Barbara Carter, Friends of the Elderly**

## 7. Analysis and actions for 2013-14



*“My job is about leadership, about inspiring people, about being a really good role model... helping the other managers fulfil their potential making everybody good managers and leaders... that’s what I think the level 5 will help me achieve.”*

**Sarah Nelson, Wirral Autistic Society**

The analysis in this section is informed by:

- Desk research of Skills for Care’s plans and strategies for workforce and qualification development; relevant white papers; government department strategies and legal frameworks for Apprenticeships and higher skills; care qualifications in FE and HE; written responses from HE partners to the specification for Specialist Adult Social Care Pathway option development.
- Face to face interviews with 11 Higher Apprentices and their employers.
- Telephone interviews with Skills for Care HE and FE partners.
- On line surveys of providers contracted to deliver HA starts, supporting employers and learners embarking on a Higher Apprenticeship in Care Leadership and Management.
- Skills for Care discussion sessions with employers and providers – in Manchester, Newcastle and London.

### **Which providers offer adult social care HAs?**

The HA General Adult Social Care Pathway is delivered by a range of providers approved to deliver learning programmes leading to achievement of the relevant adult social care sector QCF qualifications. These include FE Colleges, private training providers and employers. A number of FE providers are partners in the current Skills for Care HA project which runs to March 2013. Some FE providers worked in partnership with others (including partner HE providers) to deliver Skills for Care HAs.

### **Which HE providers have developed options for and offer the Specialist Adult Social Care Pathway? How were these options designed?**

The Specialist Adult Social Care Pathway is offered by HE providers working in partnership with FE provider partners and whose response to the specification has been approved by Skills for Care.

There are currently three HE providers offering the Adult Social Care Pathway:

<p><b>Middlesex University</b></p>	<p>Higher Diploma Professional Practice in leading and Managing Care Services (Dementia Care)</p> <p>Higher Diploma Professional Practice in leading and Managing Care Services (End of Life Care)</p> <p>Higher Diploma Professional Practice in leading and Managing Care Services (Business, Quality and Service Improvement)</p>
<p><b>University College Birmingham</b></p>	<p>Professional Diploma in Care Leadership and Management (Business Development and Enterprise)</p>
<p><b>University of Chichester</b></p>	<p>Diploma in Professional Practice in Social Care (Business &amp; Enterprise)</p> <p>Diploma in Professional Practice in Social Care (Dementia)</p>

Pathway options planned for 2013-14 include:

Middlesex University:

- Higher Diploma Professional Practice in leading and Managing Care Services (Mental Health) Higher Diploma Professional Practice in leading and Managing Care Services (Autism)

University College Birmingham:

- Professional Diploma in Care Leadership and Management (Learning Disabilities)

University of Chichester:

- Diploma in Professional Practice in Social Care (End of Life Care)

Following the Skills for Care conference on Higher Apprenticeships on March 11 2013 a further 12 HEIs, the Association of Colleges and the Mixed Economy Group of Colleges have expressed strong interest in offering/identifying Colleges to offer the Skills for Care HA Specialist Adult Social Care Pathway.

Each HE provider effectively works in partnership with FE providers and employers - these partnerships have developed Specialist Adult Social Care Pathway options as part of the project.

Through consultation with employers, providers identified different or repeated demands for options within the Specialist Adult Social Care Pathway. But, is a new Specialist Adult Social

Care Pathway option always needed? Instead of creating a new pathway option in for example, using music and performing arts in care, there may be other ways to meet such specific requests. For example, planning strategic use of performing arts for autism care could be a personalised project within an autism pathway option. Or a module could conform to a Skills for Care design template with a set of high level learning outcomes related to a work based learning project not specific to an area of care knowledge. Learners at this level will expect some scope to customise their pathway to suit their own and their employer's needs – this is better value for money and more relevant to a learner's needs at work. Yet there is a need to see consistency within and across the content and structure of Specialist Adult Social Care Pathway options and provision.

Specialist Adult Social Care Pathway modules when validated are supplied as an addendum to the developer's response to the specification. These will be examined and discussed with HE providers and within Skills for Care to establish whether it would be helpful to work towards design of a common template that could be used by all pathway option developers.

Skills for Care will need to see evidence of how the reference points linked in Appendix 2 of the specification have been used in the design of modules. This is particularly important where existing modules have been adopted or adapted for use in the Specialist Adult Social Care Pathway.

#### **Skills for Care will:**

Review which Specialist Adult Social Care Pathway options are on offer and identify their 'reach' across England.

Identify which pathway options are priority for development and where they should be offered.

Work with HE providers to:

- Produce a design template for modules within the Specialist Adult Social Care Pathway.
- Determine how Specialist Adult Social Care Pathway options can be customised for learners while maintaining consistency and coherence.
- Agree the best way for pathway option developers to present evidence that module content takes account of appropriate Skills for Care reference points.

#### **Building partnerships to reach learners and employers**

All HE providers consulted with employers (and continue to do so) through their own contacts, Skills for Care networks and provider partners. Plans for employer consultation were also submitted to Skills for Care. Each HE provider worked in partnership with FE providers – sometimes in established networks and increasingly, in new relationships with FE providers regionally and or nationally. Each new partnership made a new connection (often through the FE provider) with another network of employers. It would be fair to say that the HE providers in the project used the project to build such networks and their own capacity to reach employers, as well as designing new curricula. Skills for Care facilitated and brokered many of these new relationships and will continue to do so in order to put the pathway options and provision in place needed by employers.

HE providers were slower at first in delivering HA starts than some FE providers – the latter were able to deliver HA starts almost from day one. However it is remarkable that HE providers and their FE partners were able to deliver 325+ HA starts in (effectively) 12 weeks, at the same time as building new provider partnerships and validating new Specialist Adult Social Care Pathway options for the HA.

Skills for Care area officers were very helpful in the process of building these partnerships, using their locally established relationships with HE and FE providers. Area officers will continue to play a key role in targeted action in 2013-14 to build the capacity of HE FE provider networks delivering Skills for Care HAs.

Some partnerships for delivery of the Specialist Pathway were made between HE, FE and employer providers - and formalised through a partnership or articulation agreement. Franchising delivery of Specialist Adult Social Care Pathway options will be tested in 2013-14. How did such relationships come about and work, informally and formally? How do partners intend to go forward?

#### **Skills for Care will:**

Use Skills for Care area networks to identify and share examples of successful partnerships between employers and providers.

Use Skills for Care area networks to develop further HA/HE engagement with employers and providers and to facilitate and broker new partnerships for provision.

Through project partners, test the viability, strengths and weaknesses of the franchise model in the next phase of the project 2013-14.

#### **Job roles and Higher Apprentices**

The generic roles described in the HA framework disguise the diverse range of real job roles at management level of those HAs responding to online surveys and in interview. HAs are also open to staff selected for leadership succession planning; the employer's chosen management workforce for the future.

Skills for Care has traditionally gathered 'profiles' of learners taking qualifications and shared these in its promotional material. The same approach is needed for HAs and this is a new HA framework – with an option to progress into University – so new profiles are needed which reflect that.

Learner and employer film interviews have already been useful for this purpose; we now have 8 'profiles' on film, of workers pursuing a HA, coming from different backgrounds, in a range of roles and care settings talking about what they do, why they have chosen the HA in Care Leadership and Management and what they think about progressing to University.

#### **Skills for Care will:**

Identify the most effective ways of using filmed learner profiles (and stills with quoted text) in promoting HAs to potential learners and employers and making best use of the whole resource for internal development and external promotion.

## **Inward Progression to HAs**

The HAs interviewed so far (a small sample) can be divided into two groups. Some have been managers for some time and having started on the level 5 Diploma (before the HA was available) are now on a HA programme – completing their General Adult Social Care Pathway and contemplating taking a Specialist Adult Social Care Pathway. The second group are younger learners (24 -30) who had completed an Advanced Apprenticeship and had progressed rapidly into middle management roles. This group was immediately positive about following the Specialist Pathway, though it has to be said that all learners of all ages interviewed wanted to go on to University if the opportunity was available.

## **Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) approved Access to (Health and) Social Care qualifications and inward progression to HAs**

There are currently 144 QAA Access to Higher Education Diplomas on offer in England and Wales in (health and) social care/work. Access to HE Diplomas offer an alternative means of entry to HE for those without A levels or equivalent qualifications. The relationship between these qualifications (in England), the Advanced and Higher Apprenticeships in adult social care should be examined. As the Skills for Care HA now offers progression into University while learning at work, is there scope for interlocking Access to HE qualifications with the Advanced and Higher Apprenticeships?

### **Skills for Care will:**

Examine the relationship between Access to HE qualifications (in England), in health and social care and the Advanced and Higher Apprenticeships in adult social care and scope for improving inward progression.

## **Functional skills – locking HAs out? Or the key to the door?**

There were a variety of responses from learners and providers to the requirement to develop or evidence achievement of skills in English, Maths and ICT as part of an HA programme. These were not an obstacle for learners who had just completed their Advanced Apprenticeship – as the requirements are the same at both levels these learners had already achieved them. Older learners did not always look forward to tackling them.

*‘They are the reason why I failed at school in the first place.’*

Providers generally saw the teaching, learning and assessment of Functional Skills as an obstacle – one that had to be overcome before the HA could properly start – an obstacle that:

*‘should not be left til last’*

but there were providers that took a different view and felt they had an approach that worked for younger and older learners.



*“The Higher Apprenticeship gives managers the full package... not only are they achieving their Diploma, they are achieving their Maths, English and ICT... I’ve worked as a [care] manager myself and I believe these skills are really essential - many systems and care plans are becoming computer based. We have a 100% success rate on Apprenticeships – and that is partly because we are confident about our methods.”*

**Lorraine Carey, Northbrook College**

Skills for Care has produced a practical guide which is designed to help social care employers get to grips with functional skills in Maths, English and ICT, quickly and easily.

[Download here](#) or mail [marketing@skillsforcare.org.uk](mailto:marketing@skillsforcare.org.uk) for a free copy.

Skills for Care has also published [Learning through Work](#), a series of learning modules that develop communication and number skills in the adult social care workplace. They are designed to help supervisors deliver bite-size chunks of learning wherever natural learning opportunities arise as part of day to day care work.

Awarding organisations offering Functional Skills qualifications provide support materials to learning providers and ‘map’ these to vocational qualifications.

Supporting the development and acquisition of Functional Skills was seen as an obstacle by some providers (not all) and though some learners were worried about whether they would manage Maths, English and ICT as part of their Higher Apprenticeship, all interviewed said they had overcome their concerns and were pleased and relieved that they had learned and achieved them. Some learners reported that they *‘found out that they knew more than they thought’*, once they got started.

If care managers and specialists pursuing an HA have to tackle Maths, English and ICT, providers will need to be adequately organised and resourced in teaching, learning and assessment for the experience to be positive and successful for HAs.

Skills for Care needs to actively promote the use of its guide and learning resources to employers, learners and providers engaged in Higher Apprenticeships. Skills for Care’s skills team members have been taking Functional Skills tests to find out for themselves what the experience is like.

Why do some learning providers appear to have successful Functional Skills strategies, integrated into their Skills for Care HA programmes and others not? Skills for Care could in the longer term look at how providers organise themselves for HAs taking Maths, English and ICT to find out and share what works.

The removal of the requirement to include Functional Skills in HAs under SASE 2013 will have an impact on HAs from April 2014. The need for higher level ‘Functional Skills’ will continue to be addressed in the Specification for the Specialist Pathway under ‘Learning to Learn’ skills. These skills will be needed for progression in HE but the curriculum can be personalised by the HE Provider to meet individual needs.

## **Onward Progression:**

All HE providers had to identify onward progression routes from the HA to meet Skills for Care requirements. The current range of possibilities on offer includes:

- Progression directly onto a Middlesex University Graduate Certificate/Diploma.
- BA/BSc (Hons) programme with the addition of another 120 credits of APEL.
- Possibilities (depending on area of practice):
  - Graduate Certificate in Leading and Developing Public and Community Services.
  - BA (Hons) Professional Practice Leadership and Management for Care Services.
  - BSc (Hons) Mental Health.
  - Professional Practice Post graduate programmes.
- Learners could take these 120 L5 credits to other HE institutions for credit transfer to other related programmes. However, the amount of credit that would be recognised is not guaranteed.
- BA Social Science (University of Chichester) then can progress onto - BA (Hons) Social Science (University of Chichester).
- Specialist Practitioner Pathways in Dementia of End of Life - BA (Hons) Social Science (University of Chichester) then can progress onto - MA Social Work with Professional Practice or MA Strategic Leadership for social care.

The range illustrates the scope for progression into higher level qualifications directly relevant to care management and leadership or care specialisms, as well as into qualifications for other related professions.

Learners will of course have to meet whatever the normal requirements are for entry to the HEI but the range of progression opportunities illustrates how the HA in Care Leadership and Management can open up possibilities for learners, many of whom would not have expected to get the chance to go to University.

Even if a HA decided not to take up one of these opportunities, for the first time the scope to progress further at University is in place for those HAs in the sector that choose to take it up.

## **Social Work Reform Board links and progression**

The Social Work Reform Board plans include an Overarching Professional Standards Framework ('The Professional Capabilities Framework for Social Workers in England') - that sets out, for the first time, consistent expectations of social workers at every point of their career and which will be used to inform the design and implementation of education and training. Along with this, the Reform Board developed principles for a new approach to Continuing Professional Development. All Social Work Reform Board activity relating to qualifying education, the PCF and CPD approach is now the responsibility of The College of Social work. Skills for Care is working to support employers in implementing social work reform, including their partnership with Higher Education.

With the HAF in place and Specialist Adult Social Care Pathway options validated, there is a



need to examine the scope for using unit and qualification achievement to improve mobility and progression between social work and social care professions. It is now technically possible to use the QCF to interrogate and identify common and different skill and knowledge requirements for different professions (and roles within professions). However, this can be a complex and resource hungry process and must be driven by a clear demand from employers.

HE provider partners in the HA project may also examine the scope for onward progression into social work qualification programmes from the Skills for Care HA where this is relevant to their offer and their employer partners.

There may also be potential for the development of level 6 and 7 qualifications and Higher Apprenticeships in Adult Social Care and this should be investigated.

### **Skills for Care will:**

Examine potential progression from the HA in Care Leadership and Management into Social Work and alignment with the development of the Continuing Professional Development Framework and Professional Capabilities Framework.

Investigate the potential for the development of level 6 and 7 qualifications and Higher Apprenticeships in adult social care.

### **Learning to learn in HE:**

A comprehensive range of support services are being offered.

*'Study skills support will be available via the on-line learning platforms for all candidates/learners who enrol on the HE Pathway. Learning to learn study sessions or bridging sessions will be provided for learners who require it...'*

*'All learners on the HE programme will benefit from Online learning support integrated into their programme (if they are with an accredited training partner for their QCF Diploma then they can have this support during this phase as well). As well as module learning resources this support will include a 'Discussion group/Community of Practice'; Study skills materials and self-development exercises; research skills (particularly developed in the specialist modules); searching electronic journals; writing for different purposes... they would also be able to access specialist workshops for dyslexia or English as a second language.'*

### **Assessment**

Skills for Care asks pathway option developers to adhere to and exemplify the SFCD assessment principles in their assessment practice and in particular what approaches would be used to ensure learning from work can be used to produce evidence for assessment.

*'The HE delivery partners within the project have agreed that they will adopt a common philosophy for all module assessment within the higher apprenticeship. A minimum of 50% of assessment for any individual module will be work based. Work based assessments will,*

*wherever possible, allow a learner to tailor the assessment to their individual working context and will ensure that all learning is applied.'*

*FE College partners are working to ensure that assessments within the QCF Diploma are personalised to fit the working context of the individual and partners are working to strengthen the use of on line submission and online assessment via e-portfolios.'*

*'Students are assessed through assignments and projects relating their learning to their actual practice...'*

*They are assessed in a range of ways with both written and oral methods being used allowing for different strengths. There are specific procedures and support for students with extenuating circumstances and specific learning difficulties.'*

### **Skills for Care will:**

Identify examples of innovative and positive assessment practice which exemplifies SFCD assessment principles and share with other HA providers.

### **Recognition of Prior Learning**

The Skills for Care HA specification requires the HE provider to have a validated credit transfer arrangement in place which counts the 80 credits from the Level 5 Diploma directly toward the University qualification at level 5.

However there is also a great deal of scope for prior experiential and certificated learning to be recognised and evidenced as achievement toward the Level 5 Diploma:

*'Each of the FE College partners have well established processes in place for establishing and recognising prior experiential learning and these will be applied within the framework of assessment for the L5 Diploma.'*

*Initial Assessor visits to the Candidate settings, or an alternate 1:1 meeting, will be used as the main vehicle for the identification of prior experience or prior learning that can be used to provide evidence as part of the assessment process. Examples could be the production of work products that would demonstrate aspects of competency, or evidence of attendance at training programmes and a follow up assignment that could provide evidence of knowledge and understanding. In all cases, this will provide part of an individualised assessment programme tailored to the specific needs of the candidate.'*

### **Funding**

The cost of achieving a University qualification at level 5 through the Skills for Care Specialist Adult Social Care Pathway is considerably cheaper than through other routes.

Typically, fees for the level 5 Diploma and the Specialist Adult Social Care Pathway add up to

£3,000-£4,000, compared with £9,000 for a year of undergraduate study and £15,000-£18,000 fees for a two year Foundation Degree. An employer could draw down up to £2,070 from the Skills for Care Workforce Development Fund to cover backfill and other salary replacement costs for employees achieving an HA through the Specialist Adult Social Care Pathway. HAs are at work and earning while they learn. From 2013, most learners aged 24 and over on a level 5 HA will be eligible for student loans.

Franchising arrangements being developed by HE providers may reduce fees even further.

#### **Skills for Care will:**

Through project partners, test the viability, strengths and weaknesses of the franchise model in the next phase of Higher Apprenticeship development, 2013-14.

#### **Adapting the Specialist Adult Social Care Pathway specification model for Skills for Care kite marking**

The Skills for Care process for receiving, commenting on and approving responses to the specification used internal expertise and was able to call on external subject/occupational expertise, when needed. The process is intentionally 'light touch' recognising internal and external quality approval and assurance systems in place. Skills for Care has an interest in promoting and sharing innovative and effective ways of designing Specialist Adult Social Care Pathway options for the HA and actions for 2013-14 are designed to contribute to that.

#### **Skills for Care will:**

Consider how it might adapt the Specialist Adult Social Care Pathway specification model for Skills for Care kite marking of high quality provision or programmes.

Skills for Care will keep the Specification under review to improve consistency and coherence across Specialist Adult Social Care Pathway options and the process of approval reviewed to ensure it is adequate and fit for purpose.

# Appendix 1. Survey questions and telephone/face to face prompts

All surveys asked respondents for contact information and to add any other comments or observations they wished to make. Respondents were also asked if they would be interested in a follow up telephone interview. The following questions were also used as prompts in face to face filmed interviews.

## **Provider online survey**

### 1. Learner profiles

What is the profile of the people you are recruiting to the Skills for Care Higher Apprenticeship? Could you provide an overview of your learners in relation to age, gender, ethnicity and employment background?

### 2. Reaching learners and employers

2.1 Can you tell us about how you have reached learners and employers successfully?

2.2 Have there been any initial difficulties in reaching employers and learners?

2.2.1 If yes, please briefly say what?

### 3. Specialist Adult Social Care Pathway in the Skills for Care Higher Apprenticeship

Are you aware as a provider that Skills for Care is developing a Specialist Adult Social Care Pathway with HEIs and mixed economy colleges?

If yes, have you communicated this to learners pursuing the 'Diploma only' pathway?

If yes, what kind of response have you had?

If No, please find more information about the Adult Social Care Pathway here ([link to HA page](#)).

## **Employers' online survey**

1. What is the value of the Skills for Care Higher Apprenticeship in Care Leadership and Management for your staff and business?

## **Learner online survey**

1. What made you consider doing a Higher Apprenticeship in Care Leadership and Management?

2. What is your current job role?

3. Do you expect or hope your job role or job to change as a result of doing a Higher Apprenticeship?

4. Specialist Adult Social Care Pathway in the Skills for Care Higher Apprenticeship

Are you aware that Skills for Care is developing a Specialist Adult Social Care Pathway with Universities, in enterprise skills and in specialist Care knowledge and skills?

If yes, are you interested in pursuing the Specialist Pathway?

If No, would you like more information about the Specialist pathway?