

Gloucestershire College



Maximising the QCF through a whole organisation approach

Case Study

This case study is one of a series that provides examples of emerging practice as colleges begin to exploit the flexibilities of the QCF to develop, within current funding constraints, a curriculum more responsive to the needs of learners, employers and the local community.

The colleges featured in the case studies were selected through the LSIS QCF Support as QCF lead providers; all are committed to driving the effective implementation of QCF in their local area. It is important to note that the sector is still in the early stages of QCF implementation; some of the models are still at the planning stage, ready for implementation in 2011/12. The case studies aim to spark ideas and prompt debate; all include contact details so that, if a particular example interests you, you can get in touch with the provider to find out how the model is working out in practice.

Gloucestershire College has taken a whole organisation approach to ensure all internal and external stakeholders have an awareness of the impact of QCF and how the reforms can facilitate change. Through the Unit Funding Trials they looked at how they could adapt their curriculum to meet learners' needs and maximise the use and flexibilities of the QCF to bring in additional revenue and reduce reliance on public funding.

To begin the process of developing their whole organisation approach to QCF implementation, key managers came together to identify how each of the internal support services needed to adapt as a result of the introduction of the QCF. They put together an action plan which was used to inform implementation.

The college QCF champion, Sue Steed, Director of Curriculum, delivered bespoke awareness-raising sessions to a range of teams in the college to ensure staff received the right type and level of information. Teams included: MIS, Exams, Marketing, Student Services, Student Records and Business Development. Resources from the LSIS Excellence Gateway were used in the training sessions – QCF 'quick guides', 'Designing Programmes of Study' and 'Employer Engagement with the QCF' were particularly useful.

The college realised that partner organisations working with their future or current learners needed to have a clear understanding of the QCF and its implications so that learners were receiving accurate, up-to-date information and consistent messages.



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If you wish to develop your provision in similar ways, you might find it useful to look at the Leadership and Management section in the QCF action planner:

<http://www.excellencegateway.org.uk/page.aspx?o=328227>

Through a series of 4 initial briefing sessions, the new 'language' of the QCF was explored with key external agencies such as Connexions and Job Centre Plus. Follow up developmental work ensured that these agencies were well prepared to support young people to understand the changes and helped to strengthen their relationship with the college.

'It has been really good to be kept informed of the changes, and this training has prepared me to advise the young people we deal with' Connexions Service

The college went on to consider the opportunities for creating a more responsive curriculum offer for learners. Two full days of training were set aside for curriculum managers. The training consisted of an initial general QCF briefing and information about how the QCF would affect individual curriculum areas. Curriculum managers mapped their current curriculum where possible to new QCF qualifications and looked at

how they could develop different delivery models that would attract more learners.

To make sure that everyone was kept up-to-date and was using accurate information to inform their development planning, common spreadsheets were produced which included links to changes in guided learning hours and the standard learner number; these were updated as new qualifications came on line. The Director of Curriculum was responsible for checking funding on the Learning Aims Database and updating the spreadsheets. Senior managers could see at a glance where qualifications needed to be changed.

Top tip ... Create an effective communication channel between all stakeholder teams inside and outside the organisation with regular updates as new information becomes available.

The college wanted to exploit the flexibility of the QCF to engage new learner cohorts and enhance successful progression into work. This was assisted by a successful bid to take part in the Unit Funding Trials. The Director of Curriculum brought curriculum managers, the Quality Assurance Manager, MIS and examination staff together to plan how they were going to implement their proposals. They discussed implications and procedures to ensure everyone was fully informed about how things would work in practice. Once again the focus was on a whole college approach with good communication between interlocking stakeholders. Regular contact was maintained to monitor progress.

As part of the trials they used pre-training courses from the Sector Skills Councils for Care (Skills for Care & Development), Retail (Skillsmart Retail) and Hospitality (People 1st) designed as initial steps into the job market, to set up unitised provision to meet the needs of the unemployed. Information technology qualification (ITQ) units at Levels 1, 2 and 3 and units developing employability skills were added to these courses, as well as being used independently. Learners studied the most appropriate combination of units that met their individual needs and facilitated their return to work.

'I feel I would have dropped out if I had enrolled on the full qualification as the commitment would have been too great, but studying flexibly by unit has been perfect for my personal circumstances'
Adult learner taking part in the unit funding trials

Setting up unitised provision was time consuming. Systems were created to cope with creating individual learning aims for each unit rather than for each qualification. Triggers were designed to identify when a learner had achieved sufficient units to claim an Award, Certificate or Diploma.

Top tips.... Roll-on roll-off provision needs careful planning; put a small team in place that has the responsibility for managing the process, keeping meticulous records on progress and outcomes to jobs.

Be clear on your offer; give robust IAG around the purpose of the units you are delivering and what they will lead to in terms of employability or further study.

Outside of the trials, the college has developed a more diverse and flexible range of delivery models to meet learner needs.

Some of their full-time programmes have been enhanced by the offer of additional short qualifications such as Awards; these qualifications aim to support learners to become work ready, for example, the BTEC Award in WorkSkills, or to have a competitive edge in the job market; a Financial Studies Award, for example, adds value to a full-time Business course.

'Express' fast-track versions of twelve full time traditional vocational courses have been designed so that learners can complete full qualifications in 12 to 14 weeks. Each course has up to three entry points throughout the year.

Due to the intensive nature of these courses, the information, advice and guidance (IAG) processes prior to the start of the course have been adapted to ensure learners can cope with a 5 day a week, 9-5 programme. Interview questions include:

For ideas on developing staff understanding and knowledge of QCF, explore 'Developing Colleagues' on the QCF Support area of the Excellence Gateway <http://www.excellencegateway.org.uk/page.aspx?o=327815>

Additional IAG interview questions for fast-track courses

1. How much time do you have during the evening to undertake independent study?
2. What strategies would you use to catch up with work should you be off ill at any time during the programme?
3. How can you demonstrate that you are able to commit to an intensive programme of study? Could you give us some examples?
4. What outside commitments do you have? Do you currently undertake any part time work/study?

To enable these 'express' qualifications to run smoothly, several internal systems have been modified. The existing programme re-validation process was



lengthy and labour intensive. A desk top, fast track unit validation process was set up to ensure a quick response to requests from staff delivering these qualifications. The college's traditional practice of validating new courses at particular times of the year was not responsive enough for the new curriculum. A shortened,

electronic procedure was designed to replace the process of going through a validation panel. More responsive finance systems were set up in collaboration with the finance team so that, for example, students could set up direct debit arrangements more quickly and payments could be processed more speedily. Alternative external verification arrangements were agreed with the Awarding Organisations as the traditional two visits per year could not be fitted into courses lasting 12 to 14 weeks. After negotiation, a single visit was agreed.

As QCF implementation has moved forward, both nationally and within the college, the challenge has been to keep everyone up to date and excited by the opportunities QCF provides. The college staff magazine is used to drip feed changes and updates relating to the QCF. Curriculum leaders receive intensive training on the QCF and are responsible for disseminating information to their teams, easing the difficulty in communicating across a large organisation. Teams are brought together to discuss models of delivery for key aspects of the curriculum, such as PSD, thereby supporting consistency, ownership, and compliance with related quality assurance procedures.

The benefits of going through the changes initiated by the QCF have far outweighed the challenges.

An improved IAG service, which includes external partners, has resulted in earners receiving consistent advice from everyone they came in contact with.

The training programme delivered to key teams and curriculum managers has made sure everyone is aware of their roles and responsibilities in implementing the QCF and has set a precedent for clearer communication channels across the college.

Changes to the curriculum have brought in a wider client base which is important when public funding is reducing. The 'express' qualifications have attracted mature learners who want to re-train or change career direction and complete qualifications in order to return to employment as quickly as possible. The flexibility of multiple entry points has enabled the college to pick up learners who have dropped out of other provision but do not want to wait for the start of another academic year to continue their studies. External partners such as Connexions have also found that regular and flexible start dates better meet the needs of their clients and, as a result, have referred more learners to the college. A more flexible curriculum has meant that the Business Development team has

a wider range of products to sell to employers.

Going forward, the college wants to further enhance the flexibility of its offer to employers by using technology to deliver units and qualifications. One of the difficulties for employers is releasing staff to attend training. The college is therefore developing resources for online delivery in order to reduce the amount of release time and the negative impact on productivity. Early feedback from employers for this 'Limited Release Training' has been positive.

If you would like any further detail on the information in this case study, please contact:

Sue Steed

Director of Curriculum

sue.steed@gloscol.ac.uk

If you want to know more about the Unit Funding Trials, go to: <http://qcf.skillsfundingagency.bis.gov.uk/qcf-funding/unitdelivery/>

Learning and Skills Improvement Service
Friars House, Manor House Drive
Coventry CV1 2TE
t 024 7662 7900
e enquiries@lsis.org.uk
www.lsis.org.uk

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Please contact us at enquiries@lsis.org.uk or 0870 162 0632 quoting the document reference number to request an alternative format.

Qualifications and Credits Framework (QCF) Support (Sept 2010 – August 2011)

This sector led programme aimed to support managers and practitioners as they began to deliver the new qualifications from the QCF and use the distinctive features of the QCF to develop more flexible and responsive provision to meet the needs of learners and employers. Support was provided by regional QCF lead providers, with specific support for colleges, independent training providers and ACL/VCS providers.