



QCF Readiness Provider Support Programme QCF in action project report

Warwickshire College Building QCF readiness

Project introduction

The QCF offers many benefits to learners and employers but potentially holds a significant number of issues for providers which could affect both curriculum and support teams during implementation.

The project follows the development and implementation of a whole organisation action plan to ensure a smooth transition from the NQF to the QCF with an emphasis on short term readiness (for delivery from August 2010).

Region

West Midlands

Provider profile

Warwickshire College is a large general Further Education College with over 25,000 enrolments at six main campuses across Warwickshire and Worcestershire. It also has significant provision of Higher Education and Apprenticeships.

Author name and contact details

Patricia Bee and Rachael Kendall
Warwickshire College
Warwick New Road
Leamington Spa
Warwickshire CV32 5JE
pbee@warkscol.ac.uk
rkendall@warkscol.ac.uk
Telephone: 01926 318215

July 2010

Project objectives and intended outcomes

Our main objectives were:

- To develop and implement an action plan to ensure the systems and processes for IAG, MIS and exams were in place for migrating current NQF provision to QCF-equivalent qualifications.
- To ensure a smooth transition of the planned curriculum for 2010/2011.
- To raise awareness of the implications of the QCF to all college academic and support staff through training events and provide opportunity for staff to raise concerns or queries.

Project activities and approach

Ensuring a whole-college approach

We formed three working groups from internal college staff:

- The QCF Systems and Processes Group, chaired by the Director of MIS and consisting of staff from MIS, Exams, Registry, Student Services, IT Systems and the Quality Team. Their focus was to ensure the systems for IAG, MIS and exams were in place for migrating current NQF provision to equivalent QCF qualifications.
- The QCF Curriculum Planning Group, chaired by the Curriculum and Partnerships Manager and consisting of representatives from each Faculty, Employer Services, and the Quality Team. Their remit was to ensure a smooth transition of the planned curriculum for 2010/2011.
- The Foundation Learning Group, chaired by the Vice Principal responsible for Skills for Working Life which included representatives from across the college involved in pre-16, post-16, and 19+ Foundation Learning. Their remit was to develop a comprehensive and coherent Foundation Learning provision across the college.

Initial advice and guidance systems

Training and process reviews took place with all IAG advisers, student services staff, enrolment staff, and admissions staff to raise their awareness of the QCF and looking at any issues and the changes that would need to be made.

As a result:

- We drafted a leaflet for learners explaining the advantages of the QCF. However, we decided not to use it due to the realisation that little of the QCF credit-based system would be offered by the college in 2010/2011.
- We produced and circulated a leaflet for learners outlining the principles of Foundation Learning and the college offer.
- We reviewed the potential for financial impact on learners in terms of the education maintenance allowance (EMA), hardship funds etc., but few were identified largely because we predominantly offer full qualifications. Wherever we do offer a unitised provision it will be at full cost and therefore not eligible for such financial support.
- We are updating our tutor interview guidance to ensure that tutors discuss the implications of the QCF on existing qualifications and exemptions with learners during initial interviews.

- Unique learner numbers (ULNs) will be issued to all learners. We may replace the learner college ID number with the ULN during 2010/2011 once we have more information regarding the wider implementation of the Personal Learning Record (PLR) system. We intended to raise learner awareness of the ULN and how it enabled access to their PLR but this has been put on hold until further information is available on how that system will work.
- It was agreed that a progression route map was needed to show learners how they can progress between different QCF levels (include Foundation Learning) but this has yet to be developed.

Management information systems

- We are considering the implications of moving from a two tier to a three tier course structure for tracking purposes (i.e. adding *Unit* to the existing tiers of *Programme* and *Qualification*). Curriculum teams are already doing this but we are still looking at how this could be implemented using our current MIS software with our software provider.
- We modelled new course reporting systems using QCF pilots in ITQ, PTLLS (Preparing for Teaching in the Lifelong Learning Sector) and construction where a unitised approach was already embedded. In future, reports will include details of funding drawn from the learning aims database (LAD) as well as recommended standard learner number (SLN) values.
- QCF check sheets are currently being developed from existing destination and achievement reports to meet the new requirements of the individual learner record (ILR) such as the QCF credits studied and achieved, the percentage of funding to be claimed, fully funded units, recognition of prior learning (RPL) units, exempt units etc.
- We had considered ways of linking SLN values from the national database of accredited qualifications (NDAQ) and LAD but we have found that NDAQ does not 'talk to' the MIS software we use.

Exam systems

ULNs are in place for all learners and used on exam entry sheets and exam numbers. We tried and tested the process using pilots in construction skills under City and Guilds.

We have contacted our systems software provider with regard to implementing the ULN in the exams module of our MIS as it currently does not appear and we have to import the ULN into another field so it can be seen (duplication).

We have still to:

- Update current systems to cover all awarding body qualifications based on our learning from the pilots including areas such as downloading achievement data from awarding bodies and importing into our software. This will allow us to validate the levels of qualifications or credits taken and registered and eliminate any discrepancies with awarding body data.
- Consider issues regarding the tracking of units to meet full qualification criteria.

Curriculum migration

The QCF Curriculum Planning Group met to discuss any issues related to QCF implementation within the curriculum. These predominantly related to the timescales of accreditation of qualifications onto NDAQ.

- A *QCF Readiness Health Check* for programme areas (Appendix 1) was devised using questions from the LSIS QCF Action Planner. Each of our 16 programme areas completed the health check to determine their degree of 'QCF readiness' and devised an action plan where appropriate.
- Numerous QCF briefing meetings were held with a wide range of academic and support staff including separate meetings for assessors and verifiers and the Employer Services team. The focus of the meetings was to provide an overview of the QCF and its implications for the college. We highlighted the 'future aspirations of the QCF' in terms of credit-based funding and delivery and the 'reality' of the impact of the QCF in the short term on curriculum design and delivery.
- Awarding bodies representatives provided a briefing on the status of the accreditation of their qualifications on the NDAQ. The late accreditation of various functional skills qualifications was of particular concern.
- At our end-of-year Quality Review Meeting, programme area managers updated the Vice Principal for their area and members of the Quality Team on their progress to date. They reported on:
 - Progress against the health check action plan.
 - Programme implementation - QCF (NDAQ) qualification codes and clear award - certificate - diploma progression (where appropriate)
 - Foundation Learning development and/or current delivery (as appropriate).
 - Staff readiness to deliver up-to-date IAG.
 - Programme marketing materials.
 - Assessment and verification arrangements.

Generally, teams reported good progress but highlighted the following:

- The most significant changes related to accommodating Foundation Learning.
- Reductions in the guided learning hours (GLH) for the replacement QCF qualifications caused, in some cases, a reduction in pathways offered though optional units.
- Qualifications appeared on NDAQ but not on LAD leaving concerns regarding course viability due to the possibility of funding changes.

Quality

The Quality Team produced a further *QCF Readiness Health Check* (Appendix 2) focused on quality concerns and used it to produce an action plan including actions to:

- Update our course approvals procedure to include QCF descriptors.
- Update our self-assessment processes to include reference to programme area QCF action plans.
- Review assessor and verifier requirements to meet awarding body specifications and to consider the setting of a college standard to meet internal quality assurance expectations.
- Update our recognition of prior learning (RPL) procedures to reflect changes required by the QCF.

Foundation Learning

The Foundation Learning working party produced an implementation plan for developing and delivering Foundation Learning pathways across the College. This included:

- Customising and completing the LSIS Foundation Learning Action Planner.
- Meeting regularly throughout the year to update the implementation plan, share areas of good practice (such as delivery models) and address concerns over development and delivery such as staff training needs and the delivery of functional skills.
- Putting a functional skills policy in place to support delivery across the college.
- Providing a series of questions to help programme areas review their Foundation Learning offer for September 2010 (Appendix 3).
- Producing course modelling examples which include all components of Foundation Learning whilst ensuring that the total SLN value does not exceed 1.4.

There are now Foundation Learning programmes in place for September 2010 in nearly all vocational areas.

Evaluation and impact

The working parties have met regularly throughout the year to discuss actions to date in light of new information becoming available on QCF policy and processes. The college is reviewing and developing the systems required for supporting a more complex model for data recording, tracking and accrediting achievement.

We had concentrated on a short term action plan to ensure that our whole curriculum was moved from NQF to QCF provision in readiness for September 2010. The effect on the MIS team of this seemingly simple process should not be underestimated. Every course has had to be redefined in terms of qualification code, qualification title, and GLH - a significant task for a small team. Whilst the intention of the college over the next twelve months is to update the MIS system to deal with unit and credit tracking this has not been an immediate priority as the key purpose of our MIS is to track and record funding which at present is still based predominantly on a full qualification system.

Action in terms of curriculum development has been impeded by the slow release of specifications from awarding organisations onto the NDAQ and the LAD so, in all areas apart from Foundation Learning, curriculum teams have focused on simply 'migrating' their NQF qualifications to QCF equivalents. Some curriculum teams have chosen to change awarding bodies due to changes in assessment strategies or verification requirements, reductions in GLH or increased examination costs. The true 'aspirations' of the credit-based QCF curriculum have yet to be fully realised in terms of unit and credit-based implementation and funding and many of the qualifications the college will be offering for 2010/2011 have limited flexibility due to the rules of combination defined by awarding organisations.

The majority of curriculum development activity across the college has revolved around delivery plans for Foundation Learning. Opportunities for offering the smaller sized award qualifications within the 14-16 curriculum have proved to be particularly attractive to collaborative partnerships with schools.

Next steps, ensuring sustainability

In the short term, it is envisaged that the working parties will continue to meet on a regular basis to ensure that teams are kept up to date and any new information is disseminated to the right teams. For example, when the Personal Learning Record becomes available there will be an increased CPD need for front-line staff responsible for IAG and data tracking.

Over the longer term, we will be reviewing:

- Opportunities for optimising curriculum design and delivery - for example, to consider a common timetable for core units
- Risks to funding, qualifications, and success rates of not fully implementing the future flexibilities of QCF once these are available.

Conclusions

In the long term, the QCF offers the opportunity for a radical review of provision delivery which could not only offer greater learner choice but also significant financial and physical resource savings. This can only be achieved through a thorough review of all provision to capture all potential opportunities.

Key messages for other providers are:

- Identify a member of staff to keep up to date on QCF developments.
- Ensure there are communication strategies to get key messages to appropriate staff.
- Do not underestimate the time and finance required to update MIS systems.

Project materials

Appendix 1

Qualifications Credit Framework - Readiness Health Check (Programme Areas)

Appendix 2

Qualifications Credit Framework - Readiness Health Check (Quality Team)

Appendix 3

Preparing for Foundation Learning (Programme Areas)

Useful websites

National Database of Accredited Qualifications

Learning Aims Database

14-19 Workforce Development

QCF resources on the Excellence Gateway

Appendix 1: Qualifications Credit Framework - Readiness Health Check (Programme Areas)

Programme Area:

Form completed by:

Date:

Factors to consider	Not started ✓	Planned for, but not yet underway ✓	Underway ✓	In place ✓	Comments/further planned support arrangements that need to be taken	Priority rating to inform QCF action plan High (H) Medium (M) Low (L)
1. Leadership and Management						
1.1 A designated person is taking responsibility for leading the implementation of QCF in the Programme Area						
1.2 Contact has been made with our SCCs and Awarding Bodies to ensure the teams are up to date regarding transition of qualifications onto QCF						
1.3 Curriculum staff are aware of the impact of QCF on curriculum design including <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ how it flexibly supports unit and whole qualification achievement, ○ Rules of Combination (RoC), exemptions, Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) and Credit Accumulation And Transfer (CAT) 						
1.4 Curriculum staff are aware of components and implications of the Personal Learner Record						
1.3 Information has been provided to appropriate staff on QCF and there are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ identified training needs ○ plans in place to address these needs. 						
1.3 Business efficiencies via QCF have been identified						
2. Curriculum Planning						
2.1 A map of the existing curriculum NQF offer has been produced that identifies any gaps in QCF provision and/or opportunities for further development						
2.2 Building on existing curriculum offer NDAQ and LAD have been used to identify appropriate alternative QCF qualifications that take into account: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ GLH/SLN values ○ Full L2 or L3 status 						

2.3	Any anomalies between existing NQF offer and QCF alternatives have been identified and resolved					
2.4	On a course by course basis the most suitable QCF units and RoC have been identified to respond to the demands of learners and employers and which is cost effective					
2.5	The full flexibility's of the QCF have been utilised to deliver programmes with units from different levels					
2.6	Opportunities for new provision using QCF units and qualifications have been explored and identified					
2.7	On a course by course basis assessment requirements are in place for QCF units and where appropriate by different Awarding Organisations so that the most suitable assessment method is matched to learners					
2.8	Verification arrangements that meet Awarding Organisation requirements are in place.					
2.9	A model of delivery has been agreed for the delivery of Award, Certificate and Diplomas					
2.10	Appropriate IAG is available on QCF that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Includes an initial review of current achievement ○ includes initial assessment of learning and support needs ○ ensures learners' needs and aspirations are matched to the qualifications and units offered ○ identifies progression between Levels 					
2.11	Appropriate systems are in place for recording and assessing challenging target grades					
2.12	Marketing information has been updated to include requirements of QCF – e.g. prior achievement					
2.13	The planning and curriculum implications of exemptions, CAT and RPL have been considered					
3. Working in Collaboration with Other Teams						
3.1	Ways of working with other teams have been explored to offer common units to strengthen and broaden the curriculum offer.					
3.2	Effective working arrangements have been considered to ensure these partnerships could work effectively together using agreed protocols, quality assurance systems and processes for assessment, recording learner progress and credit transfer.					

Appendix 2: Qualifications Credit Framework - Readiness Health Check (Quality Team)

Support Area: **Quality**

Form completed by:

Date:

Factors to consider	Not started ✓	Planned for, but not yet underway ✓	Underway ✓	In place ✓	Comments/further planned support arrangements that need to be taken	Priority rating to inform FL action plan High (H) Medium (M) Low (L)
1. Leadership and management						
2.1 A designated person is taking responsibility for leading the implementation of QCF across college						
2.1 Contact has been made with SCCs and Awarding Bodies to ensure the teams are up to date regarding transition of qualifications onto QCF						
1.3 Information has been provided to appropriate staff on QCF and the Personal Learning Record and there are: o identified training needs o plans in place to address these needs.						
2. Quality Assurance						
2.1 Course Approval documentation includes QCF descriptors						
2.2 Internal QA meets SSC and Awarding Organisation requirements for assessment						
2.3 Mapping and tracking arrangements are in place for qualifications and units						
2.4 Robust procedures have been put in place to ensure appropriate recording and assessment of RPL						
2.5 The Self-Assessment process makes reference to QCF action planning						

Appendix 3: Preparing for Foundation Learning (Programme Areas)

Q1 Do you intend to deliver Foundation Learning for **16-18**?

How many Learners?

Where?

Which model(s) do you intend to use?

Which staff will be involved in delivering?

Which qualifications will you use for:

- Vocational elements?
- Functional Skills?
- PSD?

How will this provision be funded?

What will be the total GLH?

What will be the SLN value?

Q2 Do you intend to deliver Foundation Learning for **19+**?

How many learners?

Where?

Which model(s) do you intend to use?

Which staff will be involved in delivering?

How will this provision be funded?

What will be the total GLH?

What will be the SLN value?

Q3 Do you intend to deliver Foundation Learning for **14-16**?

How many learners?

Where?

Which model(s) do you intend to use?

Which staff will be involved in delivering?

Which qualifications will you use for:

- Vocational elements?
- Functional Skills?
- PSD?

How will this provision be funded?

What will be the total GLH?

What will be the SLN value?