

The Unit Award Scheme and the QCF

We are getting increasing numbers of queries about how the introduction of the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) and Foundation Learning (FL) will affect the Unit Award Scheme (UAS), and how the UAS will relate to the QCF. It is hoped that the information below will be helpful.

Status of the UAS

- The UAS is not a qualification. It has never been included in the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) and will not be included within the emerging QCF. Centres will be able to use the UAS as they always have done or use available NQF or QCF qualifications, or use both in combination.

The nature of QCF units

- QCF qualifications are made up of units, each of which is certificated independently, as well as in combination as a qualification. QCF unit certificates will only show the title, credit value and level but not the detail of exactly what the student has achieved, as reported on a student's Unit Award Statement.
- QCF units, which must be approved by OFQUAL/QCDA, are also likely to be less specific and often much larger than UAS units. UAS units will continue to offer the advantage to many of being tailor-made to suit individual requirements, for example, to give recognition for small or specific achievements, or where no other formal recognition is available.

Developing QCF qualifications

- To date, the QCF has focussed on vocational rather than subject qualifications, and a limited number of qualifications in Personal and Social Development. AQA already offers a Level 1 QCF Award in Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE) which can already be used by centres within FL (provision at Entry Level and Level 1). AQA has also submitted an Entry Level and a Level 2 qualification in PSHE for accreditation under the QCF. As with any QCF qualification, unit certificates will be issued for each unit completed as well as, where appropriate, a certificate confirming achievement of the overall qualification.

The future of the UAS

- We intend to continue to offer our current NQF Entry Level and FCSE subject qualifications, with full QCA approval, supported by the AQA Unit Award Scheme, for award up to at least 2012. Centres will still be able to accredit individual units from these specifications through the UAS, as now.

- Centres can also continue to use free standing UAS units as they always have done, eg to give credit for achievements which are too specific to be recognised in a qualification, to recognise achievement in areas of work where no other appropriate accreditation exists and to motivate students to progress to other stages like Entry Level, GCSE or QCF qualifications.
- The UAS can also be used to recognise specific achievement as a student progresses towards achieving the common Entry 1 units that form the basis of the new QCF qualifications in Personal Progress. Further details of these qualifications and the units that make them up can be found on the NDAQ (National Database of Accredited Qualifications) by searching on 'Personal Progress'.
- As awarding bodies launch more new courses, QCF qualifications will increase in number over the next few years. There will, however, remain a need to recognise achievement outside, and in support of, these qualifications and the UAS will continue to play an important role in this.
- The DCSF publication 'Delivering 14-19 Reform: Next Steps'¹ acknowledges the need for informal unaccredited (ie non-qualification) provision to help re-engage some young people and 'set them back on the path to success'. The publication refers to young people who are NEET (not in education, employment or training), have special educational needs or learning difficulties and/or disabilities, or who are facing difficult circumstances such as teenage pregnancy and substance misuse. A good example of the use of the UAS in this context is described in the Barnardo's report (see below).

There is further information about how AQA is involved with the QCF/FL on the AQA website, under 'Qualifications': http://web.aqa.org.uk/qual/foundation/foundation_lt.php

Barnardo's report

- A recent report by Barnardo's policy and research unit² makes positive references to the UAS. The report is based on research it carried out into how to re-engage young people in education and training. Many of the young people who Barnardo's work with are from marginalised groups who, for diverse reasons, are NEET. The research findings mention some of the benefits of the UAS for these kinds of student. These include the facility to achieve in a short space of time, the Scheme's flexibility, the facility to individually design units and programmes and the fact that everything is presented as small steps (which is especially important for people who need to see their progress recognised quickly). The report notes that 'For some, this (the Unit Award Statement) was the first certificate they had ever received and although young people may have 'acted cool' about it, services celebrated each achievement as a means of motivating them to further success.'

¹DCSF (Department for Children, Schools and Families) Publications - 'Delivering 14-19 Reform: Next Steps' October 2008.

² Barnardo's Policy and Research unit - 'Second Chances: Re-engaging young people in education and training' Full Report March 2009 by Jane Evans, Deborah Meyer, Anne Pinney and Barbara Robinson.