

UKVQRP e-News

Issue 6, August 2008

Welcome to the sixth e-newsletter for the Vocational Qualifications Reform Programme (VQRP). This newsletter is intended to inform those involved in developing and implementing VQ reforms about the key activities and progress of the programme. Further information can be found on www.dius.gov.uk/vqreform.

This edition of **UKVQRP e-News** highlights the following developments in the programme:

New structure for the VQ Reform Programme

Review of SSC 'approval' process

Update on Sector Qualifications Strategies & Action Plans

Progress in the development of the QCF

Invitation to employers, providers, SSCs and awarding organisations to participate in the Recognition of Employer and Provider Training Programme

News from England

- QRSP: Supporting providers in England
- Apprenticeship Frameworks and the Implementation of the QCF

News from Wales

- Launch of the Skills Strategy for Wales

New structure for the VQ Reform Programme

As noted in the May edition of **UKVQRP e-News**, changes to the programme management structure are currently being explored to aid the implementation of the reforms. The proposals being put to the Ministers in the four countries include:

- Revision of the remit of the UKVQR Programme Board. Membership would remain the same.
- Creation of country-level boards to ensure the integration of VQ reforms with other aspects of skills policy relevant in each country.
- Taking forward two previous sub-programmes – Funding, Planning, Performance and Delivery (SP3), and Communications (SP5) – principally at the country-level to ensure integration and coherence across governments' strategies.

The proposed UK VQ Reform Programme structure is:

Representatives of the 4 country-specific implementation boards and qualifications regulators

Sub-programme 1 (4 country) – Sector reform, including Sector Qualifications Strategies and Action Plans. It is also proposed to integrate this work with that on National Occupational Standards.

Sub-programme 2 (3 country) – Qualifications and Credit Framework development and implementation.

UK-wide communications – ensuring consistent messages and approach across the UK.

Research and evaluation of the programme across the UK.

Review of SSC 'approval' system

Since September 2007, 13 Sector Skills Councils and one Standard Setting Body have been piloting systems by which these bodies 'approve' VQs for accreditation in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. The aim of the piloted systems is to fulfil the Leitch aim of enabling SSCs to play a more formal role in defining the content, avoiding duplication, ensuring consistency and determining that the proposed VQs are needed by their sector. The remaining 12 SSCs have retained the previous approach of supporting VQs prior to accreditation and have 'supported' several hundred VQs for accreditation onto the QCF.

The pilots concluded at the end of July 2008, as originally planned. Independent evaluators are currently assessing the pilots and the UKCES will consult with SSCs and awarding organisations through briefing sessions during October. A consultancy, GHK, has been commissioned to advise on the best way forward and to develop an implementation plan for a new approvals system across all SSCs.

The final approach will ensure that the approvals system is streamlined and non-bureaucratic, and will formalise the role of SSCs' support in a way that provides transparency and consistency. The new system is expected to be rolled out in late 2008 or early 2009 – a decision will be made at the end of September. An appeals process will form part of the new system.

Between August and the roll out of the new system, SSCs should revert back to supporting qualifications as they did prior to the pilot. Any qualifications which are part-way through the pilot 'approval' system can continue until the end of August, but only if both the SSC and awarding organisation agree to continue. As SSCs will no longer need to access the web-based accreditation system (WBA), awarding organisations are asked not to assign any new proposals to SSCs.

If you have queries, please contact Sue Densley, Head of Qualifications Reform, UKCES. Email: sue.densley@ukces.org.uk.

Update on Sector Qualifications Strategies & Action Plans

All 25 Sector Skills Councils (SSCs) and 18 Standard Setting Bodies (SSBs) are engaged in a Sector Qualifications Reform Programme which involves developing Sector Qualifications Strategies (SQSs) based on in-depth Labour Market Research, and then developing Action Plans which specify those VQs required by their sectors and those needing reform to meet sector needs and QCF specifications. The Action Plans are living documents which will be refreshed as required.

Once all SSCs are fully engaged, the Action Plans will be submitted annually in line with the LSC's planning cycle in England so that SSCs can, at the same time, specify those VQs that are priorities for English funding. Pilot and Phase 1-3 SSCs are already in line with the LSC's planning cycle.

The following provides an update on the work of SSCs and SSBs, on a phased basis.

Pilot Phase

- Construction Skills
- Skillfast-UK
- SkillsActive/MSC
- SEMTA
- Improve Ltd

These organisations' SQSs and Action Plans were approved in July 2007, their initial Action Plans were in place until the end of January 2008 with an interim annex covering the period from 1st February until the end of June 2008. They have now almost completed the implementation of their Action Plans and the outcomes are currently being assessed. These SSCs have also submitted their 2008/09 SQS Action Plans which are currently being independently assessed.

Phase 1 SSCs

- Cogent
- GoSkills
- Lantra
- ProSkills
- Skills for Health
- Skills for Logistics

SQSs approved in October 2007, and Action Plans by February 2008. The Plans are currently being implemented and the development of the VQs on the Plans should be completed by end January 2009.

Phase 2 SSCs

- Skillsmart Retail
- Energy & Utility Skills
- Skills for Justice

SQSs approved in February 2008 and Action Plans for the period 1 May 08 to 30 June 09 have been signed off. The development of VQs in accordance with the Plans is now beginning.

Phase 3 SSCs

- Asset Skills
- Automotive Skills
- e-Skills
- Financial Services Skills Council
- LLUK
- SfC&D
- Skillset
- Summit Skills
- SkillsActive*

** covering remainder of footprint not covered in pilot phase activity*

SQSs approved by July 2008 and the majority of SSCs have submitted their 2008/09 Action Plans and will soon commence the development of the VQs specified in them.

Phase 4 organisations

- Government Skills
- BPA (Parking)
- HABIA
- Ceramics
- ECITB
- Furniture
- Skills for Security
- ICS (Customer Services)
- NCVO (Voluntary)
- MSSSB (Marketing & Sales)
- SfEDI (Business Enterprise & Support)
- UKWoodchain
- Paper
- Creative and Cultural Skills
- Council for Administration
- CILT (Languages)

These organisations have been divided into phases 4a and 4b. Phase 4a organisations are due to complete their SQSs or Qualifications Strategies (QS) by September 2008 and their Action Plans by January 2009. Phase 4b should complete their QSs by March 2008 and Actions Plans by July 2009.

Progress in the development of the QCF

At the end of June the qualifications regulators in England, Wales and Northern Ireland – QCA, DCELLS and CCEA – submitted a series of reports to Ministers and the UK VQR Programme Board, evaluating the evidence from the QCF trials and development work, and proposing an approach to implement the new framework across the three countries.

The evaluation found that the participants in these tests and trials are strongly supportive of the QCF as a vehicle for delivering greater choice and flexibility to learners. There are already more than 500 qualifications on the QCF which is testament to that enthusiasm and to the work which QCA, the regulatory authorities, awarding organisations, providers, Sector Skills Councils, employers and learners have undertaken. The UK VQR Programme Board is highly appreciative of all the work which everyone has put in.

The reports presented to Ministers set out a preferred way to deliver the new framework, including proposing IT services and systems which are integrated with the MIAP (Managing Information Across Partners) initiative. The documentation was well received and the regulators and the Learning and Skills Council (LSC), the organisation responsible for MIAP, have now been asked to work together to proceed to the next stage in the development of the QCF and provide detailed delivery plans to Ministers by the end of September.

The QCF remains open for business while the detailed future approach is being finalised, with interim solutions in place where needed to ensure that QCF qualifications can continue to be developed, accredited and taught over this period. The trial systems are currently being reviewed and details about when a fully operating interim learner record will be provided shortly by the QCA.

Invitation to employers, providers, SSCs and awarding organisations to participate in the Recognition of Employer and Provider Training Programme

John Denham, the Secretary of State for Innovation, Universities and Skills in England, announced the start of this programme at the CBI Skills Summit in 2007, responding to employers' request to accredit high-quality company training. The scheme is one of the key promises of *"World Class Skills: Implementing the Leitch Review of Skills in England"*. John Denham hailed the QCA's announcement in January 2008 that McDonald's, Flybe and Network Rail were the first employers to be recognised as awarding organisations, as *"an important step towards ending the old divisions between company training schemes and national qualifications"*. When more new awarding organisations were announced in April, John Denham added that *"this Government is determined to recognise and promote excellence in training, wherever it is delivered."*

In April, following the success of the programme's pilot from October 2007 to March 2008, the Secretary of State asked the QCA to work closely with Ofqual, the National Employer Service, the CBI and other employer organisations, SSCs and awarding organisations to expand the programme to involve more employers. About 50 employers have so far engaged in the scheme, with many more in the pipeline.

The programme provides employers with choices which allow organisations of any size and type to be able to achieve accreditation for their in-house training. Employers can:

- Become a recognised awarding organisation, recognised by the qualifications regulators as providing the requisite standard of quality assurance to develop and award their own nationally accredited qualifications
- Work with an existing awarding organisation that designs and awards bespoke qualifications for the employer and provides the quality assurance and accreditation
- Work with a third party (such as a provider, sector regulator, trade association or professional body) which becomes a recognised awarding organisation itself or works with an existing awarding organisation to award VQs for employer(s). This option allows SMEs to offer tailored VQs. For example, a trade association can develop and award VQs for its membership, which might include hundreds of small businesses.

Whatever type of awarding organisation develops VQs, SSCs play the same role in ensuring that VQs meet the needs of their sector, that there is consistency of standards and that there is no duplication of VQs across the sector.

This programme creates new opportunities for employers, providers, SSCs and existing and new awarding organisations to meet the VQ Reform Programme's aims of improving flexibility and responsiveness in a time of rapidly changing skills needs. SSCs and awarding organisations, as well as employers and providers, are all encouraged to discuss with the QCA how you can be involved in and support this exciting initiative. For more information on how to become involved please email recognition@qca.org.uk or visit www.qca.org.uk/recognition, which includes case studies of those organisations who have already engaged in the programme.

Recognising employer and provider training in Wales

Wales is participating in the above Accreditation of Employer and Provider Training Programme. It already has in place a mechanism for employers and providers to have their training credit rated and admitted to the Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales.

Recognising Employer Training Programmes in Scotland

The Scottish Credit & Qualifications Framework already allows companies of all sizes, and from all sectors, to gain national recognition for their training without the need to seek awarding organisation status. Companies can work with one of Scotland's credit rating bodies to have their qualifications recognised on the SCQF. Scottish colleges, universities and the Scottish Qualifications Authority are currently authorised to allocate SCQF level and credit although work is underway to explore how the number and range of credit rating bodies can be extended. Further information on the SCQF can be found at www.scqf.org.uk.

News from England

QRSP: Supporting providers in England

The Qualification Reform Support Programme (QRSP), delivered by the Learning and Skills Network on behalf of the Quality Improvement Agency, is designed to help FE providers prepare for the changes to vocational qualifications and the phased implementation of the Qualification and Credit Framework.

Throughout the autumn, the support programme will continue to raise awareness of the vocational qualification reform programme among FE providers through regional roadshows and 'join the reform dots' seminars that will put the Qualifications and Credit Framework into context with other reforms.

QRSP is keen to work with a range of providers including work-based learning providers, voluntary and adult community providers and offender learning organisations. The programme will also work with people in a range of roles who are involved in delivering qualifications, including learner support and IAG staff, MIS managers, quality managers and staff development managers.

If you would like to get involved with the work of QRSP, you can contact the programme at: QRSP@lsneducation.org.uk.

For more information about the range of support activities, please visit the website at www.qrsp.org.uk.

Apprenticeship Frameworks and the Implementation of the QCF

The LSC has been working with The Alliance of Sector Skills Councils (TASSC), the UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UKCES) and the Apprenticeship Approvals Group to review the current requirements for integrating QCF qualifications into Apprenticeships. The process and timescales have been reviewed and changes have been agreed that will allow increased flexibility.

During the QCF Test and Trials the LSC required that Apprenticeship frameworks be wholly comprised of qualifications within either the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) or QCF. A phased approach has been agreed that outlines initial flexibility in 2008/09 and 2009/10 for SSCs and awarding organisations to bring QCF qualifications incrementally into Apprenticeship frameworks, with a view to ensure that all Apprenticeships are wholly within the QCF by August 2010.

Launch of the Skills Strategy for Wales

Skills That Work for Wales: A skills and employment strategy and action plan was the subject of consultation between 17 January and 10 April 2008. The final strategy was published on 15 July.

Skills That Work for Wales sets out a reform agenda for education and training at all levels, with the aim of achieving full employment in Wales and helping sustain economic growth. Four key proposals drive the agenda:

- **New approaches to funding**, including a contributions policy that will focus public funding where it can make the greatest impact and reflect the principle of shared responsibility for improving skills.
- **More demand-responsive skills and business support**, with a stronger role for Sector Skills Councils, reformed vocational qualifications and joined-up services for business.
- **Integrated skills and employment services** offering flexible and comprehensive support for people outside the labour market, delivered through partnership between the Assembly Government and Department of Work and Pensions.
- **Reconfiguration** to create a learning network with the capacity, scale and quality to deliver the skills of the future.

The strategy seeks to integrate closely skills and business development policies, as well as skills and employment policies. The Deputy First Minister, responsible for the Department of Economy and Transport, is a joint signatory to the strategy.

The Wales Employment and Skills Board has a key role in monitoring delivery of the Action Plan and will give independent advice and challenge to Ministers through an annual report.

To access the document, visit the Welsh Assembly website:

http://new.wales.gov.uk/topics/educationandskills/policy_strategy_and_planning/skillsthatforwales/?lang=en

Contact the Programme Office

The Programme Office is always very happy to answer any questions.

Paul Cohen	Head of Programme	
	Paul.cohen@dius.gsi.gov.uk	0114 259 4225
Supported by Pauline Foy	Pauline.foy@dius.gsi.gov.uk	0114 259 4220
Andy Walls	Programme Leader	
	Andrew.walls@dius.gsi.gov.uk	020 3300 8307
Supported by Sue Moore	sue.moore@dius.gsi.gov.uk	0114 259 3829
Robyn Cox	VQRP Communications Manager	
	Robyn.cox@dius.gsi.gov.uk	020 3300 8228
Supported by Wendy Simpson	wendy.simpson@dius.gsi.gov.uk	020 3300 8229
& Christine Eaton	Christine.eaton@dius.gsi.gov.uk	0114 259 1045
Daniel Gee	VQRP Policy Manager	
	Daniel.gee@dius.gsi.gov.uk	020 3300 8230

Remember - for more information visit the UK VQRP website:

www.dius.gov.uk/vqreform