

Guidance for developing rules of combination for the Qualifications and Credit Framework tests and trials

Version 1



Qualifications and
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Rewarding Learning

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Part one: Introducing rules of combination

1 About this document

- 1.1 The purpose of this document is to provide information and guidance to support the development and functioning of rules of combination during the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) tests and trials (from September 2006 to July 2008).
- 1.2 It will be useful to awarding bodies and others who are involved in the process of qualification development during the framework tests and trials. It will also be useful to sector bodies in developing approaches to rules of combination within their work on sector qualification strategies (SQS), and to other bodies involved in planning provision for the new framework.
- 1.3 It should be read alongside the *Working specification for the Qualifications and Credit Framework tests and trials* and other guidance documents produced to support the testing and trialling process (eg *Guidelines for writing units of assessment for the Qualifications and Credit Framework tests and trials*). In addition, documents produced to support other elements of the Vocational Qualifications Reform programme will be useful reference points (eg SSDA's *Draft eligibility criteria for standards setting bodies*).
- 1.4 It focuses on what rules of combination are and what they do, and sets out the need for a standard format for rules of combination. It illustrates the concepts that will be applied in developing rules of combination, but does not detail the process by which they are entered in the IT system – the web-based accreditation (WBA)¹ system.
- 1.5 It will be subject to evaluation during the first phase of framework development up to July 2007. An updated version will be produced for the second phase of framework development (from September 2007 to July 2008).

2 About rules of combination

- 2.1 Rules of combination specify the credits that need to be achieved, through particular units, for a qualification to be awarded. All qualifications within the framework will have rules of combination.

¹ The regulatory authorities' web-based accreditation system has been adapted to support the entry of all data about units and qualifications during the framework tests and trials.

- 2.2 Rules of combination will not be accredited outside the context of a qualification. Although other bodies (eg employers, providers) may advise learners that particular groupings of units are useful for a particular purpose (eg a job role), rules of combination within the framework will relate only to the process of accumulating credits in order to achieve a specific qualification.
- 2.3 Rules of combination are not the only component of qualifications. Other information about qualifications will also be important. The information required when a qualification is submitted for accreditation during the test and trial period is based on the existing regulatory authorities' current requirements. The information that the regulatory authorities require for accreditation purposes is set out in the WBA user's guide and on the WBA system.
- 2.4 Regulatory criteria and arrangements are being reviewed as part of the framework tests and trials. The outcomes of testing and trialling rules of combination will inform this review.

3 The purpose of rules of combination

- 3.1 In the framework, rules of combination are the mechanism through which sets of achievement are grouped together into a qualification. In this respect rules of combination serve a similar purpose as existing qualification structures in the National Qualifications Framework (NQF).
- 3.2 Within the framework – and subject to the rules of combination for each qualification – credits are transferable between all qualifications and awarding bodies. This second purpose of rules of combination is not present in the NQF.
- 3.3 The scope of opportunities for credit accumulation and transfer will vary between different qualifications. For example, where a qualification is designed to recognise the skills and knowledge required for a particular job role, the opportunities for credit accumulation and transfer might be limited by way of a tightly structured set of rules.
- 3.4 Where a qualification is designed to offer a broad initial introduction to a job role or industry, a more 'open' set of rules of combination might be designed to support a much wider range of opportunities for credit accumulation and transfer.
- 3.5 Rules of combination specify that credits should be achieved through particular units consistent with the rationale of a qualification. Rules of combination that reflect a wide range of qualification rationales will exist in the framework.

- 3.6 Rules of combination also ensure that the accumulation and transfer of credit has a purpose in terms of employment, progression, career or personal development. For example, rules of combination will enable sector bodies to establish requirements for credit achievement that will enable sector requirements to be represented within the framework.

4 The development of rules of combination

- 4.1. Developing rules of combination is an integral and essential part of qualification development in the framework. Rules of combination will be designed to meet the needs of a wide range of stakeholders, for example learners, employers, higher education institutions and professional bodies.
- 4.2. Bodies may develop rules of combination in a number of different ways – the regulatory authorities will not set any requirements on the process of development. The framework tests and trials provide an opportunity to establish effective practice in collaborative activities – between sector bodies, awarding bodies and other partners – to develop rules of combination appropriate to sector needs.
- 4.3. The regulatory authorities will only be involved in the development of rules of combination when commissioned to do so by government.
- 4.4. The regulatory authorities will make available a rules of combination standard format within which rules of combination will be developed within the framework. During the framework tests and trials this will be located within the WBA system. Part two of this document identifies the main features of this standard format.

5 Rules of combination within qualifications

- 5.1. Rules of combination will be submitted to the regulatory authorities as part of the information required for accreditation of qualifications. Rules of combination themselves will not be accredited separately from a qualification. This reflects existing arrangements in the NQF.
- 5.2. Only recognised awarding bodies may make submissions for accreditation of qualifications. During the first phase of the framework tests and trials until July 2007, ‘recognised awarding bodies’ are defined as those currently recognised to offer qualifications within the NQF.
- 5.3. In considering proposals for accreditation, the regulatory authorities will want to make sure that rules of combination for each qualification:
- are consistent with the rationale for that qualification
 - establish coherence of the qualification in relation to the rationale
 - set out a range of achievement requirements that have maximum value for learners for progression, employment or career and personal development

- establish the widest range of opportunities for credit accumulation and transfer consistent with the rationale for the qualification
 - meet any requirements for establishing the acceptability of the qualification to external agencies (eg sector bodies, industry regulators, professional bodies, etc).
- 5.4 Where a qualification aims to meet the needs of a particular workforce covered by an SQS, the regulatory authorities will want to make sure that rules of combination within accredited qualifications are consistent with the relevant SQS for that workforce.
- 5.5 Only part of the information that awarding bodies supply to centres, assessors, moderators, verifiers and others will be submitted for accreditation. It therefore follows that two awarding bodies might offer quite distinctive qualifications to learners, even though both these qualifications are based on identical rules of combination.
- 5.6 During the framework tests and trials, all qualifications will be accredited up to 31 August 2008. Rules of combination may be amended during the accreditation of a qualification, for example to reflect the availability of new units. As is the current practice, amendments to rules of combination made during the framework tests and trials will be subject to regulatory authority approval.
- 5.7 Once accredited, individual awarding bodies will be responsible for all their qualifications within the framework – they will be responsible for ensuring that all learners meet the requirements of the rules of combination before a qualification can be awarded. Awarding bodies will need to make sure that their approved centres are able to make recommendations for the award of qualifications based on completion of the relevant rules of combination.
- 5.8 The process of accreditation of rules of combination within qualifications will be monitored and evaluated during the framework tests and trials to ensure that awarding bodies are proposing (and the regulatory authorities are approving) rules of combination in ways that are consistent with the aims of the framework, as identified in *Working specification for the Qualifications and Credit Framework tests and trials*.

6 Shared and owned units within rules of combination

- 6.1 Within the framework unit databank, units will be identified as available:
- to all awarding bodies to award credit (shared units)
 - to a defined group of awarding bodies to award credit (restricted units)
 - only to the awarding body who submitted the unit to award credit (private/owned units).

- 6.2 Shared units may be:
- developed by, or through, a sector body that requires them to be made freely available to all awarding bodies operating in that sector
 - developed by a government agency or other publicly funded body that requires them to be freely available as a condition of use
 - developed by an awarding body or group of awarding bodies that chooses to make them freely available to others.
- 6.3 Where a qualification is built only from shared units, the rules of combination for that qualification may also be shared. In these circumstances a single qualification title can be linked to the set of rules.
- 6.4 Where rules of combination includes one or more units that are only available to one awarding body, that set of rules will be unique to that awarding body. Similarly, where a set of rules includes units restricted to a small group of awarding bodies, those rules will be unique to members of that group.
- 6.5 In these circumstances qualification titles cannot be unique to a single set of rules. The same qualification title may have different sets of rules of combination for each awarding body offering that title. Therefore, availability of shared units to be used in qualifications has an impact on the ability of awarding bodies to share rules of combination.
- 6.6 The working specification of the framework does not require that all units be shared. The impact of this on the development of rules of combination and on the operation of credit accumulation and transfer will be a significant feature of the evaluation of the framework tests and trials.
- 6.7 If a sector body wants to make sure that rules of combination are to be shared between different awarding bodies, it also has to ensure that all units within such rules are also shared. The approach to developing such shared rules of combination may be determined through an SQS.
- 6.8 Within such shared rules of combination it would be possible for different awarding bodies to offer different subsets of units. Providing all units offered by an awarding body fell within the rules, there is no expectation that all learners will be guaranteed access to all the units identified within these rules.
- 6.9 It also follows that individual providers may offer subsets of available units within a single qualification. There is no assumption that a provider has to guarantee access to all units within a set of rules in order to be approved to offer the qualification based on these rules.

- 6.10 Where rules of combination are shared between awarding bodies, the individual qualifications based on these rules of combination may differ between awarding bodies (see 5.5) and the brand identities of individual awarding bodies may be used on these different qualifications.

Part two: Developing rules of combination

7 A standard format for rules of combination

General

- 7.1 A standard format for rules of combination² within the framework has been established and will be evaluated through the framework tests and trials. The way in which data is captured and validated to conform to the requirements of the standard format is via the WBA system. The process for capturing this data via an interactive IT application is obviously different to that which can be expressed in a paper-based document. Although the process for capturing rules of combination via the WBA system looks different, the concepts and requirements set out in this document still apply.
- 7.2 The rules of combination standard format will make sure requirements for achievement of a qualification are presented in a consistent way. It will also help tutors, assessors, guidance workers and others to help learners plan routes to achievement within the framework. In particular, it will enable users to compare the requirements for achievement of a qualification with the credits accumulated or transferred by individual learners.
- 7.3 All data about qualifications (including rules of combination) and units will be entered through the WBA system.
- 7.4 Over time, the rules of combination could become an important tool for providing information to awarding bodies to support the process of awarding qualifications. It could also be an important tool for learners, and those supporting them, in planning programmes leading to the award of qualifications through the process of credit accumulation and transfer.
- 7.5 This document considers each element of the rules of combination standard format, identifies its key features and explains its purpose. Appendix 1 shows examples of qualifications set out in this standard format.

Minimum requirements

- 7.6 Rules of combination set out the minimum requirements for credit achievement leading to a qualification. Within the framework, learners will be awarded credit for all achievements, irrespective of whether or not

² The standard set of information required to structure a rule of combination.

these lead to a qualification. This means that learners may achieve credits above and beyond the requirements of a specific qualification.

- 7.7 In this context all sections of the rules of combination standard format identify the minimum requirements for credit achievement necessary to meet the requirements of the qualification. All credits achieved beyond this minimum will be recorded in the learner achievement record (LAR), but will have no impact on the award of the qualification.

The standard format

- 7.8 A standard format has been developed to capture all the required information about rules of combination. The table below details the main elements of this rules of combination standard format. WBA has been adapted to provide a means of data entry for this standard format. Users will need to refer to the WBA user's guide in order to understand how to enter rules of combination data into the system.

Section	Purpose
Qualification title	Identifies the size and level of the qualification (which may include endorsed pathways within the qualification), together with its indicative content
Credit values	Identifies the overall credit value for the qualification and the requirements for credit achievement at each level of the framework
Mandatory units	Lists the mandatory units (if any) for the qualification
Optional units	Lists the optional units (if any) for the qualification and the requirements for credit achievement from these units. It is possible to make units mandatory within particular optional pathways or routes to achieving a particular qualification
Combinations of optional units	Sets out any required or barred combinations of optional units, and (if relevant) any requirements to achieve credit(s) from particular groups of units
Units with equivalent values	Identifies credits that may be counted towards the qualification from units that are not offered to learners by the awarding body as alternatives to optional and mandatory units

Section	Purpose
Credits from other units	Sets out the possibilities for credits from other units (ie other than those listed in the mandatory and optional units) to count towards the achievement of the qualification
Exemptions	Identifies other qualifications, or part qualifications, outside the new framework, that may exempt holders from the requirements to achieve credit(s) through particular units

8 Qualification title

General

- 8.1 The first piece of information for all rules of combination will be the title of the qualification. Information about qualification titles is included in *Working specification for the Qualifications and Credit Framework tests and trials* (section 19). In some instances, reference may need to be made to other titling requirements (eg those of sector bodies).
- 8.2 All qualification titles within the framework will follow a titling convention. This will represent the level of the qualification, its size and its indicative content. Endorsed subtitles of main qualification titles will represent specialist achievements within the main qualification (see ‘Pathways’ below).
- 8.3 The following example illustrates the titling convention of qualification titles within the framework: Level 3 Certificate in Childcare.
- 8.4 Although awarding body names are not included in these formal titling conventions, for rules of combination, the names and/or brand identities of awarding bodies will be pre-fixed to these titles once they are accredited and offered to learners.

Qualification level

- 8.5 The level of a qualification is derived from the rules of combination for the qualification. A minimum of 60 per cent of credits must be achieved at the level of the qualification or higher, and the rules of combination for all qualifications will reflect this requirement. Where rules of combination do require the achievement of credit(s) at a level above the qualification, the regulatory authorities will expect these to be a small proportion of the total number of credits required for achievement of the qualification.

- 8.6 The 60 per cent requirement relates to credit achievement and not to the number of units through which credit is achieved. Therefore, it would be possible for 60 per cent of the credits in a qualification to be achieved through, for example, 40 per cent of the units.
- 8.7 There is also the opportunity to specify an overall rule about the minimum credits that must be achieved at the level of the qualification. This section will only be used when the structure of the options given to learners within a qualification mean that it would otherwise be possible to meet the requirements of the qualification without achieving 60 per cent of the credit at the level of the qualification.
- 8.8 Sector bodies, industry regulators or government agencies may set requirements over and above this minimum for individual qualifications; some qualifications may require 100 per cent of credits to be achieved at one level. In accrediting rules of combination within qualifications, the regulatory authorities will want to ensure that credit achievement requirements balance a reasonable challenge to learners with the maximum opportunity for success.

Qualification size

- 8.9 Within the framework, the size of a qualification is represented through the use of the terms ‘award’, ‘certificate’ and ‘diploma’ to indicate respectively small, medium and large qualifications.
- 8.10 The definitions of ‘small’, ‘medium’ and ‘large’ are represented within the framework by the minimum total value of the credits required to achieve the qualification. This total credit value is determined by the rules of combination, and is unrelated to the level(s) at which credit is achieved.
- 8.11 For the framework tests and trials, the following ranges of credit values have been established for each of these qualification sizes.

Award	Certificate	Diploma
1 to 12 credits	13 to 36 credits	Over 36 credits

- 8.12 The framework tests and trials will provide an opportunity to evaluate the effectiveness of these ranges of credit values in representing the relative sizes of qualifications to users.

Indicative content

- 8.13 The remaining part of the qualification title will be the responsibility of the submitting awarding body (or awarding bodies), though again reference may need to be made to any other titling requirements. Awarding bodies will build upon existing best practice and there will be no requirement for the use of particular keywords.

- 8.14 As with the NQF, the approval of a title will be part of the process of accreditation and the regulatory authorities will seek to ensure that qualification titles are appropriate and reflect expectations and requirements from sectors, industry, professional bodies or others.

Pathways

- 8.15 In a similar way to the NQF, within the framework tests and trials it will be possible to identify pathways to the achievement of endorsed subtitles of the main qualification through rules of combination. The format of endorsed subtitles will also follow existing NQF conventions. For example: Level 3 Certificate in Engineering (Mechanical); Level 3 Certificate in Engineering (Electrical).
- 8.16 In these circumstances, each endorsed subtitle will be described through a separate set of rules of combination. The guidance that follows about the development of rules of combination relates to qualifications and to different pathways within qualifications.
- 8.17 Where pathways are identified, it will be for the submitting awarding body (or bodies) to establish a rationale for grouping individual pathways under a single qualification title rather than submitting separate qualifications. Reference may need to be made to sector requirements in relation to individual pathways.
- 8.18 Individual pathways must be identified at the same level as the ‘main’ qualification. In other words, it would not be possible to identify a pathway at Level 1 within a main qualification at Level 2. These would need to be submitted as separate qualifications. The requirements for determining the level of a pathway will be the same as those set out above for an individual qualification.
- 8.19 Similarly, all pathways within a qualification must fall within the range of credit values for the main qualification identified in paragraph 8.1. Therefore, if the main qualification title falls within the ‘diploma’ range, all pathways must also be diplomas. Providing this convention is observed, the credit values of individual pathways may be different from each other and from the main qualification. The credit value of the qualification will be the same as that of the pathway with the lowest credit value.

9 Credit values

Credit value of the whole qualification

- 9.1 The credit value of the qualification is the number of credits required to achieve the qualification (ie not the total credit value of all the units available within the qualification). In the WBA system there is the facility to state the required number of credits to be achieved at the level of the qualification or above.

- 9.2 The credit value shown in this section of the rules of combination standard format will simply record the total. It will be validated in order to confirm that it is consistent with the information in the following sections, and with the terminology for credit value ranges used in the qualification title.

Credit value at each level

- 9.3 Credit value at each level identifies the total number of credits that must be achieved at each level of the framework in order for the qualification to be awarded.
- 9.4 The credit value(s) shown in this section of the rules of combination standard format needs to be consistent with the previous section and with the following sections of the rules of combination. It will also need to be consistent with the level of the qualification incorporated into the qualification title.

Credit value of mandatory units

- 9.5 Mandatory units may be identified at more than one level. The total credit value of the mandatory units will be the sum of all mandatory units. Credits from these units must be achieved if the qualification is to be awarded. This credit value must be the sum total of the credits from the mandatory units listed.

10 Mandatory units

- 10.1 The concept of core or mandatory units is a familiar feature of many existing qualifications. Within the framework tests and trials, the term 'mandatory' is preferred, as this more accurately describes the nature of these units.
- 10.2 Mandatory units are those through which credit must be achieved in order for the qualification to be awarded. There is no maximum or minimum number of units within a qualification that may be designated as mandatory. It is possible that some qualifications will have no mandatory units.
- 10.3 This section of the rules of combination standard format is to list the mandatory units in the qualification. In certain instances, learners may be offered an 'either/or' choice within the list of mandatory units. This will occur when a unit is updated and, for a certain period of time, both 'old' and 'new' units may be available to learners. Despite this limited opportunity to choose, these will still be mandatory units.
- 10.4 The designation of a unit as mandatory is a property of the rules of combination and is not a permanent feature of the unit itself. Therefore, a unit designated as mandatory in one set of rules of combination may be an optional unit within a different qualification or even in another rule of combination (pathway) in the same qualification.

11 Optional units

Credit value of optional units

- 11.1 Like mandatory units, this section of the rules of combination standard format lists the optional units in the qualification. The first part summarises the total number of credits that need to be achieved through optional units in order for the qualification to be awarded.
- 11.2 There is no fixed proportion of credits that may be achieved through optional units. Some qualifications in the framework tests and trials will contain no optional units. Others may be made up entirely of optional units.

List of optional units

- 11.3 There is also no limit to the number of optional units that may be included within the rules of combination standard format. In considering proposals for accreditation, the regulatory authorities will want to ensure that the number and proportion of credits available through optional units is consistent with the rationale for the qualification.
- 11.4 Credits from optional units may be achieved at more than one level. The listing of optional units within the rules of combination standard format will follow the same conventions as those for mandatory units.
- 11.5 It will be for the awarding body offering the qualification to determine the scope of the units that may be offered to learners from the list of options. In some instances this scope may be limited by sector body requirements.
- 11.6 As the offer of assessment to a learner on any unit is dependent on a centre's ability to conduct valid, reliable and consistent assessment of that unit, the inclusion of a unit within the list of optional units does not guarantee to a learner that the unit is available through all awarding body centres.
- 11.7 All the optional units available to learners within the qualification will be listed in this section of the rules of combination standard format. In certain instances these units may be listed in particular combinations or groups.

12 Combinations of optional units

General

- 12.1 The rules of combination standard format will enable two types of rule to be developed within optional units:
- required combinations, ie those units that must be combined with other units within the rules (eg x and y)
 - barred combinations, ie those units that may not be combined with other units within the rules (eg x or y).

- 12.2 Rules of combination may also be structured using groups. By applying these rules, and structuring qualifications through groups, it is possible to identify further ways in which credit requirements are specified.
- 12.3 Rules of combination are used to set out the credits that can count towards the achievement of a qualification. The concepts of required and barred combinations are limited to the units listed within the rules of combination for a qualification.
- 12.4 All options for achieving a qualification will be specified using these two rules. Although, there are many different variations on how these two rules will be applied, combined and used.
- 12.5 The awarding body or bodies submitting a qualification for accreditation will determine how complex the rules relating to required and barred combinations in optional units might be. In many instances these rules will be determined, or influenced, by the requirements of sector bodies within the context of an SQS.

Required combinations

- 12.6 Requiring particular combinations of optional units enables qualification designers to set out requirements for unit and credit achievement consistent with the rationale for the qualification. These design features may be determined or influenced by sector bodies and others.
- 12.7 In some instances required combinations may be used to ensure that learners choose units that are closely related to each other, and therefore offer a coherent set of interrelated achievements. In other instances required combinations may be used to ensure a diversity of achievements is recognised.
- 12.8 The concept of ‘required combinations’ encompasses the identification of co-requisites and sequencing within units. The requirement that unit a must be assessed before unit b is a type of required combination, as is the rule that unit d can only be assessed in conjunction with units a, b and c. In such circumstances awarding bodies would issue guidance to centres about these requirements for programme delivery. Such guidance would fall outside the scope of the rules of combination standard format.

Barred combinations

- 12.9 The framework specification does not assume that each unit title will be unique. Awarding bodies can develop units with identical titles to other units already available within the unit databank. The framework prototype IT system will automatically bar the combination of any unit with the same title as a unit within the qualification. Awarding bodies will also identify barred combinations where this is appropriate to a structure of optional units within a particular qualification.

- 12.10 There is a connection between barred combinations of units and the operation of the system of credit accumulation and transfer within the framework. Where a unit cannot be combined with another unit because it is too similar, it follows that either unit may be counted towards the same qualification.
- 12.11 Units with identical titles are one example of barred combinations. Where this is the case, credits will be transferable automatically between these units. Credits will also be transferable where the title is identical and the level and/or credit value is higher than those of the unit within the 'receiving' qualification. Where a sector body or regulatory body identifies specific assessment requirements for a unit, this process will not be automatic.
- 12.12 In presenting information about barred combinations, awarding bodies will need to take account of one of the purposes of barred combinations within rules of combination – every barred combination of units will automatically identify opportunities for credit transfer.

Optional unit groups

- 12.13 Required or barred combinations of optional units may be organised and represented by placing them in different groups. This is a common feature of many existing qualifications and one that can be used within the framework tests and trials to structure and simplify the presentation of choices of optional units to learners.
- 12.14 As with other methods of presenting required or barred combinations, organising optional units into groups can ensure that learner choices are constrained within the rationale of the qualification. For example, learners may be required to select all their optional units from either group a or group b. In other instances learners will be required to select a minimum number of units from each of groups a, b or c.
- 12.15 Groups may include units that are closely related to each other. In other instances groups may include a wide variety of units. Requiring learners to make optional choices from the first type of unit group might be appropriate in an area of occupational specialism. Requiring unit choices to be made from the second type of group might be appropriate for a qualification aimed to provide a broad-based introduction to a sector or subject.

13 Units with equivalent values

- 13.1 Units with equivalent values are those units that an awarding body does not award as part of a qualification, but will accept in the place of a unit or units listed in the mandatory or optional units sections of the rules of combination standard format. In order to be accepted as an equivalent,

the unit must have the same credit value (or greater) than the unit within the qualification, and be at the same level (or higher).

- 13.2 Units with equivalent value will often be owned by another awarding body. They will therefore not be available to another awarding body to identify as mandatory or optional units within their rules of combination. The identification of units with equivalent values within the rules of combination format is therefore necessary in order to protect the principle of credit transfer in a system where some units are not available to awarding bodies.
- 13.3 Awarding bodies may also use this section to identify units that are available to them, as they are shared, but that they choose not to award. They may also identify credit from units that have expired but that the awarding body deems may still count towards the achievement of a qualification.
- 13.4 Identifying units in this section of the rules of combination standard format rather than within the 'listed units' sections will enable awarding bodies to maintain a wide range of possible choices of routes to achievement for learners, while at the same time offering a coherent and easily accessible range of mandatory and optional units. Such a facility will be particularly useful in large qualifications with relatively 'open' rules of combination.
- 13.5 It will be for the awarding body submitting the qualification for accreditation to determine the scope of equivalent values and identify these within the rules of combination template. Again, the scope for determining such equivalent values may be constrained by an SQS or similar planning mechanism.
- 13.6 How awarding bodies use the equivalent values section of the rules of combination standard format will depend both on the rationale for the qualification and the particular approach of the awarding body proposing the rules of combination. Some awarding bodies may choose to identify a wide range of equivalent values in order to maximise the ability of learners to transfer credits into a qualification; other awarding bodies may make much more limited use of this facility.
- 13.7 In most instances equivalent credit values will relate to optional units. However, there is no reason why units with equivalent credit value cannot be identified for mandatory units within the qualification – again assuming these fall within the constraints of an SQS or similar planning mechanism. The rules of combination standard format offers the opportunity for both types of named unit to be identified.

13.8 During the test and trial period of the framework, the regulatory authorities will have a particular interest in the use of this facility and whether it helps to deliver the anticipated flexibility of the framework. It will also be important to explore the influence that sector bodies have on determining the scope of equivalent credit values in rules of combination.

14 Credits from other units

- 14.1 Qualifications within the framework may also allow the achievement of credits from units other than mandatory or optional units. These are referred to simply as ‘other credits’ within the rules of combination standard format.
- 14.2 Unlike mandatory and optional units, these other units will not be explicitly listed within rules of combination. During the test and trials of the framework the facility to achieve credits through other units within rules of combination will be defined within four parameters:
- the number of credits to be achieved
 - the minimum level at which the credits must be achieved
 - the subject or sector classification of the units through which credits must be achieved
 - the time limit within which credits may be counted towards achievement of the qualification (optional).
- 14.3 The format for expressing rules about credit achievement from other units allows awarding bodies to use one or more of these constraints in setting out the requirements for credit achievement. Within these constraints, any units available to the learner from the framework unit databank may be counted towards the achievement of the qualification in question.
- 14.4 The only restrictions on this facility for counting credits from other units towards a qualification will be:
- the automatic identification of barred combinations within the unit databank (eg units with the same title, level and credit value)
 - the other requirements of the rules of combination for the qualification.
- 14.5 It will not be possible for learners to ‘bypass’ the rules on barred combinations within optional units (or on equivalent credit values) by including credits from such combinations within this section of the rules of combination. In other words, learners gaining additional credits from optional units above the minimum required may count them within this part of the rules of combination standard format providing that they comply with the requirements on barred combinations.

- 14.6 The facility to accumulate credits from other units within rules of combination relates both to the units actually available to a learner as part of their current programme of learning, or to credits gained previously through any qualification or awarding body in the framework. Providing credits are still current in relation to the rules of combination, they may be counted within the broad parameters outlined above.
- 14.7 The use of credit from other units will be linked to the rationale for the qualification. The proportion of credits achieved from such 'other' units will normally be a small proportion of the total number of credits within any set of rules of combination. In many instances this proportion may be zero – there is no compulsion on awarding bodies to include credit from other units within an individual set of rules of combination. It is likely that this facility will be used most often where the purpose of the qualification is to promote progression or to provide an introduction to a sector or subject.
- 14.8 There is the potential for learners to attempt to count very similar credit towards the achievement of qualifications through other credits. Awarding bodies using the facility to count credit from other units towards a qualification will need to consider the implications of this facility and may want to issue appropriate guidance to centres to ensure the integrity of qualifications awarded. This is a facility that will be monitored closely in practice during the framework tests and trials.

15 Exemptions

- 15.1 All the above features of the rules of combination standard format relate to the achievement of credits through units within the framework. Within the template it will also be possible to identify opportunities for learners to claim exemption from some of the requirements for credit achievement on the basis of qualifications or other awards (or components of these awards) gained outside the framework.
- 15.2 As exemptions will, by definition, already have been formally recognised through some form of certification outside the framework, no credits will be awarded where an exemption is granted. In the future, exemptions will be recorded in a separate section of the LAR.
- 15.3 This facility to claim exemption from credit achievement requirements within a qualification is an important feature of the rules of combination template. It will enable learners to claim exemption on the basis of:
- qualifications or unit certificates already achieved within the NQF
 - qualifications or certificates awarded outside the NQF (eg access to higher education diplomas)

- qualifications or certificates awarded in other UK frameworks (eg in Scotland or in higher education)
 - qualifications or certificates gained overseas.
- 15.4 Where exemption is identified against the requirements for award of a qualification within the framework, this exemption will always be represented in relation to units within the qualification, ie a learner will be exempt from the requirement to achieve a number of named units. A learner cannot achieve a qualification in the framework on the basis of exemption from all the credits required to achieve that qualification.
- 15.5 During the framework tests and trials awarding bodies will be able to identify opportunities for exemption within their submissions for accreditation and to enter these in the appropriate section of the rules of combination standard format. Such proposals will be subject to accreditation in the same way as other aspects of the proposed qualification.
- 15.6 Over time the regulatory authorities will be responsible for ensuring that arrangements for exemption within rules of combination are developed consistently and equitably for learners. The framework tests and trials provide an opportunity to explore a structure and procedures for agreeing and recording exemption arrangements.
- 15.7 Exemption is distinct from the accreditation of prior experiential learning (APEL). Exemption can only be claimed and granted on the basis of certificated experience. No credits are awarded to learners for granted exemptions. Therefore, in certain instances, a qualification may be achieved through a combination of credits awarded and exemptions granted.

The accreditation of prior experiential learning

- 15.8 Where a learner would like to claim credit for prior experiential (ie uncertificated) learning, then the framework will facilitate this process. In such circumstances credit will be awarded to learners submitting evidence of their prior learning through a quality assured process at an awarding body centre. As credits are awarded to learners through APEL, then there is the opportunity for this credit to count towards the achievement of a number of different qualifications.
- 15.9 APEL is therefore a type of assessment offer leading to the award of credit, rather than a feature of rules of combination. Within the LAR, there will be no recorded distinction between credits achieved through APEL and credits achieved through other forms of assessment.

Appendix 1: Examples of the rules of combination standard format

Below are paper-based examples of the standard format for different rules of combination. They have been designed to illustrate the different level of information needed depending on the complexity of the rule of combination.

The web-based accreditation system (WBA) has been adapted to provide a means of data entry for this standard format. Users will need to refer to the WBA user's guide in order to understand how to enter rules of combination data into the system.

Example 1

Qualification

Title	Level Two Award in Orienteering
Total credit value of qualification	6

Mandatory units

774109	Orienteering for beginners	Two	6
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Example 2

Qualification

Title	Level Three Award in Individual Outdoor Pursuits
Total credit value of qualification	12
Credit value at level three	9
Credit value at level two	3

Mandatory units

Credit value of mandatory units at level three	6
Credit value of mandatory units at level two	3

List of mandatory units

341886	Planning an outdoor event	Three	3
277639	Running an outdoor event	Three	3
554097	Health and safety for outdoor pursuits	Two	3

Optional units

Group A

227499	Orienteering	Three	3
113429	Camping	Three	3
871223	Rock climbing	Three	3

Equivalent credit values (mandatory units)

554097	Health and safety for outdoor pursuits	Two	3
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Is equivalent in credit value to

011446	Health and safety for sports coaches	Three	3
547299	Health and safety for fitness instructors	Three	6

Equivalent credit values (optional units)

871223	Rock climbing	Three	3
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Is equivalent in credit value to

365109	Mountaineering	Four	6
782231	Mountaineering	Three	6

Example 3

Qualification

Title	Level Three Certificate in Outdoor Pursuits
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Total credit value of qualification	30
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Credit value at level three	18
Credit value at level two	12

Mandatory units

Credit value of mandatory units at level three	6
Credit value of mandatory units at level two	3

List of mandatory units

341886	Planning an outdoor event	Three	3
277639	Running an outdoor event	Three	3
554097	Health and safety for outdoor pursuits	Two	3

Optional units

A minimum of 6 credits must be obtained from each group.

List of optional units**Group A**

641553	Orienteering	Three	6
033287	Orienteering	Two	6
897240	Camping	Three	6
117834	Camping	Two	6
236100	Rock climbing	Three	6
989231	Rock climbing	Two	6

Group B

830766	Football skills	Three	6
208166	Football skills	Two	6
722605	Cricket skills	Three	6
117489	Cricket skills	Two	6
987112	Rugby skills	Three	6
667103	Rugby skills	Two	6

Equivalent credit values (mandatory units)

554097	Health and safety for outdoor pursuits	Two	3
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Is equivalent in credit value to

011446	Health and safety for sports coaches	Three	3
547299	Health and safety for fitness instructors	Three	6

Equivalent credit values (optional units)

236100	Rock climbing	Three	6
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Is equivalent in credit value to

365109	Mountaineering	Four	6
782231	Mountaineering	Three	6

Credits from other units

Three credits at level two from subject/sector class 'Sports and Recreation'
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Exemptions

Six credits at level two may be exempted from any optional unit in Group B on the basis of any British Sports Institute Level Two Certificate in the relevant sport

More copies

This document can be downloaded from the regulatory authorities' websites:

www.qca.org.uk/framework/

www.wales.gov.uk

www.ccea.org.uk

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The Qualifications and Credit Framework will form part of the Credit and Qualification Framework for Wales (CQFW).

The CQFW embraces all post-16 and higher education in Wales. Further details can be found at www.cqfw.net.

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