



Qualifications and  
Curriculum Authority



AWDURDOD  
CYMWYSTERAU,  
CWRICWLWM AC ASESU  
CYMRU  
QUALIFICATIONS,  
CURRICULUM &  
ASSESSMENT AUTHORITY  
FOR WALES



# Working specification for framework tests and trials

*Version 1*

---

April 2006

# Contents

Introduction	3
Pilot framework	5
Regulatory arrangements for the framework tests and trials	7
Framework working specification (as the basis for initial testing and trials from 2006)	10
Annex A: Unit proforma	26
Annex B: Electronic rules of combination template	27

# Introduction

## 1 Context

1.1 Over the past few years, a range of initiatives has been undertaken in each of the four countries of the United Kingdom to address the need for qualification reform. In November 2005, Ministers agreed the establishment of a Programme Board to oversee reform by bringing together key strands of work across the UK. Framework Development forms a key strand within the Vocational Qualification Reform Programme.

1.2 The overall aim is to develop a jointly regulated credit and qualifications framework for England, Wales and Northern Ireland. This should be a simple and rational organising structure for units and qualifications which reforms the current three country National Qualifications Framework and is capable of supporting the accumulation and transfer of credit achievement over time (CAT).

1.3 Over the next two years there is agreement across the three regulators (QCA, ACCAC<sup>1</sup>, CCEA) in England, Wales and Northern Ireland to:

- test and trial the mechanisms and processes needed to revise the current national qualifications framework and provide advice and recommendations to Ministers with a view to establishing a regulated, and enabling credit and qualifications framework
- ensure articulation<sup>2</sup> as closely as possible with the Scottish Credit and Qualifications framework (SCQF)<sup>3</sup> in order to explain and understand the relationships between the framework
- trial and agree a common set of credit principles in order to articulate as closely as possible with the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ)<sup>4</sup> to support learner progression in England and Northern Ireland
- take account of emerging European credit and qualification developments
- agree a common set of credit principles which allow articulation with the Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales (CQFW)<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> ACCAC will become part of the Welsh Assembly Government on the 1 April 2006 and references will be changed

<sup>2</sup> The explicit meaning of 'articulation' will be clarified during the programme development process

<sup>3</sup> The **SCQF** includes all the qualifications awarded and accredited by Scottish HEIS and the SQA.

<sup>4</sup> The FHEQ encompasses degrees, diplomas, certificates and other academic awards (except honorary degrees and higher doctorates) granted by a university or college under its degree awarding powers. Development and population of the FHEQ is coordinated by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education.

<sup>5</sup> The CQFW embraces all post-16 and higher education in Wales and is being established jointly by: ELWa, HEFCW and ACCAC.

- take account of other credit related developments in the four countries outside the scope of this development.

1.4 The overall aim of the Sub-Programme is to develop a jointly regulated credit and qualifications framework for England, Wales and Northern Ireland. The testing and trialling of the framework forms the basis of this programme of work and activities will develop from work previously undertaken across the UK on credit and qualification development. The work will also support other key policy initiatives in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, such as the Skills Strategy (England), Skills Strategy (Northern Ireland), CQFW policy development (Wales) and Progress File developments (Northern Ireland).

## **2 Purpose of the working specification**

2.1 The working specification describes the proposed features of a unit-based qualifications framework, underpinned by a credit accumulation and transfer system, that will be tested and trialled from 2006 to 2008. It also provides information on the regulatory arrangements that will underpin the trials.

2.2 The working specification provides the basis for beginning trials in September 2006. Many definitions and requirements will need to be rigorously tested, and in some cases it is anticipated that as a result of tests, the specification and requirements will be revised. A clear change control mechanism will operate to ensure changes to the specification are completed only after full evaluation and agreed change controls have been completed.

2.3 Guidance on the initial operational processes to support the specification, including IT requirements, will be produced separately and these will be developed as the trials progress.

2.4 The document has been developed from several sources of information:

- responses to the joint consultation document on the Framework for Achievement (FfA) published in November 2004 by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA), the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and the Skills for Business Network (SfB)
- contributions to the series of technical seminars and modelling workshops run by QCA from May to July 2005

- the outcomes of various research and development projects run by QCA and LSC during 2004/5
- meetings with stakeholders during the latter part of 2005 and early 2006
- QCA/Federation of Awarding Bodies (FAB)/Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ) synthesis paper
- advice from Ministers at the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) following receipt of recommendations from QCA, LSC and the Skills Sector Development Agency (SSDA) in October 2005 on taking forward the framework
- evaluation reports on other credit and qualifications frameworks in the UK and internationally
- *Principles for a credit framework for England* (QCA, 2004)
- *Credit and qualifications framework for Wales (CQFW) credit common accord* (National Council – ELWa, June 2003)
- Northern Ireland Credit Accumulation and Transfer (NICAT) work on credit in Northern Ireland.

## Pilot framework

### 3 Purpose

3.1 The purpose of the framework is:

- to provide a flexible and simple structure within which unit-based qualifications can be located
- to provide a structure within which:
  - achievements can be recognised and recorded through the award of credits and qualifications
  - the level and size of achievements can be easily identified
  - the mechanisms necessary to support the accumulation and transfer of credits can be developed.

### 4 Scope

4.1 The pilot framework is inclusive:

- it will have the capacity to recognise all types of quality-assured assessed achievement by all types of learner

- it will be capable of supporting systems to recognise achievement at all levels, in all sectors and subjects, and at all ages
- it will have the capacity to include learner achievements across England, Wales and Northern Ireland

4.2 The framework will be regulated by the three regulatory authorities in England, Wales and Northern Ireland under the statutory provisions for the regulation of external qualifications, as published in *The statutory regulation of external qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (2004).

4.3 Within the scope are regulated qualifications and learning achievements valued and needed by employers and other agencies that currently lie outside the NQF.

Areas that are out of scope are:

- higher education (HE) – qualifications within the FHEQ are not in scope
- achievements in Scotland in the SCQF (whilst taking into account NVQ/SVQ developments)
- achievements not subjected to the statutory regulatory responsibilities of the qualification regulators **except** those learning achievements that are defined within the sub-programme as important for trials within the framework
- at this time, GCSE and A levels (reviewed in the light of the development of Specialised Diplomas and the Welsh Baccalaureate).

## 5 Higher education

5.1 The framework recognises the scope of the existing Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (England, Wales and Northern Ireland) (FHEQ). At higher levels, achievements may be represented in the pilot framework, the FHEQ or both.

5.2 The regulatory authorities are working with higher education bodies to develop a set of common credit principles and operational criteria for a credit system that will support the development of clear progression pathways for learners moving from FE to HE institutions.

## **6 Europe**

- 6.1 The pilot framework is designed to be consistent with the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), which is a meta-framework that enables articulation between all national qualification frameworks in Europe.
- 6.2 The working specification takes account of credit developments within ECTS (European Credit Transfer System) and ECVET (European Credit and Vocational Education and Training).

## **Regulatory arrangements for the framework tests and trials**

### **7 Regulatory criteria to be used during the tests and trials**

- 7.1 The regulatory arrangements for the tests and trials will be based on the existing regulatory criteria for awarding bodies' procedures and qualifications, as published in *The statutory regulation of external qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (2004)*.
- 7.2 Basing the tests and trials on the existing criteria ensures that public confidence is maintained and that learners, providers and end users such as employers and higher education can be confident that provision available during the test and trial phase is of high quality, transparent and is readily understood and valued. It also builds on existing arrangements that provide a basis for recognition and accreditation that is known and understood by awarding bodies.
- 7.3 New regulatory criteria will be developed during the test and trial phase, following a full regulatory impact assessment, a period of formal consultation and an evaluation of the findings from the tests and trials and other relevant credit developments across the UK. Implementation of the new criteria will depend upon ministerial decisions regarding full implementation of the framework in 2008.
- 7.4 The regulatory authorities recognise that the existing criteria were not written to support a unit-based qualifications framework underpinned by a credit accumulation and transfer system. For example, there may be instances where criteria relating to assessment and quality assurance arrangements need to be interpreted differently or need to be

suspended in order to fully test and trial the proposed flexibilities and inclusiveness of the framework.

- 7.5 To ensure that quality standards are not compromised, that a consistent approach is used and that all awarding bodies participating in the tests and trials are treated fairly and equally with regard to the regulatory criteria they must meet, the regulatory authorities will set up a regulatory sub-group. This group will have an advisory role on regulatory issues relating to the pilot framework, will include awarding body representation, and will sit as an advisory group within the management arrangements of the framework development sub-programme.

## **8 Arrangements for recognising awarding bodies to operate within the pilot framework**

- 8.1 **Initially**, only NQF awarding bodies that have been recognised by the regulatory authorities and have successfully completed the awarding body update process and received approval for access to the 5 day accreditation process will be recognised to operate within the pilot framework. Awarding bodies who have proven expertise in credit gained via other initiatives will be particularly important in the initial phases. The regulatory authorities will work with those awarding bodies who have not met the requirements but wish to participate in trials to ensure their applications for 5 day accreditation and awarding body update are prioritised and processed in time for them to participate in the trials.
- 8.2 In addition, awarding bodies participating in the trials will have to meet specific requirements relating to the development of units and qualifications and the implementation of a credit accumulation and transfer system and test these during the trials. These requirements are highlighted in each section of the working specification and will be supplemented by further guidance.
- 8.3 Awarding bodies will not be required to revise existing processes and systems or develop new ones **prior** to participating in the trials. Instead, awarding bodies may develop new working arrangements as part of the tests and trials, and the regulatory authorities will evaluate how awarding bodies have met the requirements through monitoring arrangements.
- 8.4 As part of the tests and trials, the regulatory authorities will work with awarding bodies and other stakeholders to explore how the existing criteria for awarding body

recognition need to be re-specified to meet the requirements of the new framework and to enable a wider range of awarding bodies to operate within it.

## **9 Submission of units**

9.1 All awarding bodies participating in the framework trials will be required to submit their units to the framework through a prototype unit databank. Further details of this requirement can be found in Section 17.

9.2 As part of the tests and trials, the regulatory authorities will work with stakeholders to explore what quality assurance mechanisms, regulatory criteria and partnership arrangements would need to be put in place that would:

- enable organisations other than recognised awarding bodies to submit units to the unit databank
- ensure consistent standards in the development of units for the framework.

9.3 As these arrangements have not yet been developed, this version of the specification will refer only to the role of awarding bodies in submitting units to the framework through the unit databank

## **10 Accreditation of qualifications**

10.1 All awarding bodies participating in trialling qualifications will be required to use the regulatory authorities' piloting arrangements and a revised version of the web-based five-day accreditation process that reflects the requirements of the pilot framework. Further details of accreditation arrangements can be found in the qualifications section.

## **11 Monitoring of qualifications**

11.1 The regulatory authorities will develop a post-accreditation monitoring plan to monitor a sample of qualifications included in the trials. Evidence from the monitoring activities will feed into the overall evaluation of the test and trial phase and the development of new regulatory criteria and supporting guidance.

## **Framework working specification (as the basis for initial testing and trials from 2006)**

### **Levels**

#### **12 Key features**

- 12.1 There are nine levels of achievement within the framework, covering entry level to level eight.
- 12.2 All units and qualifications in the framework will have a level.
- 12.3 A set of level descriptors is being produced to promote a shared understanding of each level and to help consistently determine levels for units.

#### **13 Level descriptors**

- 13.1 The level descriptors describe the range of generic outcomes that are characteristic of each level. These outcomes are listed under three broad areas:
- knowledge and understanding
  - application and action
  - autonomy and accountability.
- 13.2 The descriptors are designed to be generic in nature. They are intended to integrate vocational, occupational, academic and professional achievements, as well as those relating to personal development. The descriptors are designed to apply to all learning contexts, whether formal, non-formal or informal.
- 13.3 The descriptors are intended to be indicative, not prescriptive, in that they provide a reference framework for determining the level of a unit.
- 13.4 The level descriptors build on those developed through the Northern Ireland Credit Accumulation and Transfer System (NICATS), the existing level descriptors of the NQF and a range of level descriptors from frameworks in the UK and internationally. They are designed to be consistent (at higher levels) with the levels of the FHEQ.
- 13.5 A final draft version of the level descriptors with supporting guidance will be produced for use within the framework tests and trials.

### **Testing and trialling requirement**

Awarding bodies will be required to use the level descriptors and to put in place processes to ensure consistency in determining levels for units.

For the purposes of testing and trialling, awarding bodies will be required to record details of these processes and the resulting outcomes. The regulatory authorities will review this information through monitoring and evaluation activities.

## **Units**

### **14 Key features**

- 14.1 Units are the building blocks of the framework. They provide the basis for constructing qualifications and awarding credit.
- 14.2 A unit is defined as a coherent and explicit set of learning outcomes and related assessment criteria, with a title, credit value and level.
- 14.3 Each unit must be capable of being individually assessed.
- 14.4 Each unit must be capable of contributing towards at least one qualification.
- 14.5 Details of all units within the framework, including constraints on use, will be included in a unit databank.

### **15 Definition of a unit**

- 15.1 Within the pilot framework, the term 'unit' refers to a unit of assessment. Information on delivery arrangements, for example details of unit content/coverage, assessment methods or learning modes, are not included within the definition of a unit, but can be specified within the supporting documentation for a qualification or unit produced by awarding bodies and providers.
- 15.2 The requirement to specify units as units of assessment is being introduced to test:

- whether it enables awarding bodies to make consistent judgements about the level and credit value of units
- whether it gives awarding bodies and providers offering the same unit sufficient flexibility to develop different delivery arrangements to meet specific needs of learners
- the impact of this increased flexibility on assessment standards and comparability.

15.3 The definition of a unit requires all units to have the following characteristics:

- **Learning outcomes** that set out what a learner is expected to know, understand or be able to do as the result of a process of learning. Learning outcomes should not assume that the learning has been undertaken in a particular manner, so learning outcomes can include statements that encompass knowledge, skills and understanding. There is no limitation on the number of learning outcomes that a unit may contain, but the learning outcomes must be coherent, explicit and assessable.
- **Assessment criteria** that specify the standard a learner is expected to meet to demonstrate that a learning outcome, or set of learning outcomes, has been achieved. Assessment criteria should be sufficiently detailed to support a consistent judgement that a learning outcome has been achieved – there are no minimum or maximum number of assessment criteria that relate to each learning outcome. The criteria should not dictate the method of assessment to be used.
- A **title** that explicitly indicates the content and context of the unit, and is intelligible in its own right. Unit titles cannot make reference to other units or to particular qualifications. In the case of single-unit qualifications the unit title may be part of the qualification title.
- A **credit value** that specifies the number of credits that will be awarded to a learner who has achieved the learning outcomes of the unit. The credit value of the unit will remain constant in all contexts, regardless of the assessment method used or the qualification(s) to which it contributes. Learners will only be awarded credits for the successful completion of whole units. One credit is awarded for those learning outcomes achievable in ten hours of learning time.

- A **level** that represents the complexity, autonomy and range of achievement expressed within the unit. The level of a unit is determined by reviewing the learning outcomes and assessment criteria of the unit against the level descriptors. Each unit has one level that is a constant property of the unit, irrespective of the qualification(s) within which the unit is placed.
- It is expected that the test and trial period will enable a rigorous examination of the characteristics of units to ensure that the unit pro forma is fit for purpose in relation to the objectives of the framework.

15.4 There are no proposed restrictions on the size (credit values) of units, although the advantages and disadvantages of restricting credit values for units in order to create a stable credit system and support learner achievement will be explored further in the framework tests and trials.

## **16 *Developing and submitting units***

16.1 Awarding bodies submitting units to the unit databank will be required to demonstrate that they have robust processes in place for unit development. Further information on this requirement is provided in the box below.

16.2 Collaborative working to develop units that can be shared by two or more awarding bodies will be encouraged and supported during the trials, as this will create credit transfer opportunities for learners.

16.3 Sector Qualification Strategies will be developed throughout this period and will provide the strategic driver for the development of units for use in sectoral and occupational contexts and qualifications. Other provision planning tools, such as the Foundation Learning Tier, will also help to bring coherence to unit development.

16.4 Any awarding body submitting a unit to the framework will be responsible for maintaining and reviewing that unit to ensure it continues to meet users' needs. This includes situations when an awarding body allows units to be made available to other awarding bodies.

16.5 In the case of units developed through collaborative working arrangements, the regulatory authorities will explore through the test and trial period whether one awarding

body should have lead responsibility for submitting and maintaining units or whether partnership arrangements should or could be recognised.

16.6 Guidance on unit development will be available to support the framework tests and trials.

### **Testing and trialling requirement**

Awarding bodies submitting units to the framework will need to demonstrate that their processes for unit development:

- involve an appropriate range of expertise from relevant people and organisations
- include a clear and transparent process for referencing or mapping to national occupational standards (if appropriate)
- include a clear and transparent process for referencing or mapping to other appropriate standards or curricula (if appropriate)
- lead to the development of units that meet the technical requirements listed in Section 15
- ensure consistency in determining levels and credit values for units
- lead to the development of units that are clearly understood by users.

These requirements may be met in different ways. As units form the basis for credit accumulation and transfer, the processes must promote confidence in the system that all units are being developed to the same quality standard and are relevant to the needs of learners, providers and employers.

Awarding bodies will be required to record details of these processes and their outcomes for the purposes of the tests and trials. This information will be reviewed by the regulatory authorities through monitoring activities. The findings will inform the evaluation of the tests and trials.

## **17 Unit databank**

- 17.1 All units submitted to the framework will be placed in a prototype unit databank. A prototype databank will be developed for the trials, building on awarding bodies' and the regulatory authorities' existing IT systems.
- 17.2 The establishment, maintenance and monitoring of the databank will form a significant strand of the trial work and the *Tests and trials prospectus* invites proposals from awarding bodies to engage with more detailed work on these areas.
- 17.3 The databank will enable framework users to search for information about individual units. Learners and those advising them will be able to identify the units that best meet learners' needs, while awarding bodies will be able to more easily identify those units offered by other bodies which could be incorporated within the rules of combination for their own qualifications and therefore create credit transfer opportunities. The databank will also help providers identify appropriate units to include within customised learning programmes.
- 17.4 Units entered into the databank will be checked electronically to ensure the pro forma requirements have been met. The content of individual units will not be scrutinised by the regulatory authorities, as they will focus on the awarding body's processes for unit development through awarding body recognition and monitoring activities.
- 17.5 Units within the databank will be classed as 'active' or 'inactive'. Active units are those included within the rules of combination for one or more qualification. Inactive units are those units that have been submitted to the databank, but have not yet been included within the rules of combination of an accredited qualification. Access to inactive units will be restricted to those involved in developing qualifications. Awarding bodies will not be able to include inactive units within the rules of combination for a qualification without the consent of the body who owns the unit.
- 17.6 The regulatory authorities will assign to each unit a unique code and an 'entry' date to record when the unit was submitted to the databank. The databank will also indicate which awarding bodies can offer the unit, for example whether the unit is 'shared' by a group of awarding bodies or is available to all awarding bodies.

### **Testing and trialling requirement**

To enter units into the databank, awarding bodies will be required to submit information on an electronic unit pro forma. A paper version of the unit pro-forma is attached as Annex A.

The pro forma will require awarding bodies to provide details of the unit characteristics, such as learning outcomes, assessment criteria, credit value, level and title. Awarding bodies will also have to provide the following additional information about units to support the search function of the database and facilitate credit transfer:

- aims of the unit
- unit expiry date
- details of the relationship between the unit and relevant national occupational standards (if appropriate)
- details of the relationship between the unit and other standards or curricula (if appropriate)
- assessment requirements specified by a sector or regulatory body (if appropriate). A sector or regulatory body may specify that awarding bodies and providers must follow particular assessment arrangements where there is a clear strategic rationale for doing so, for example to meet licence-to-practise requirements or to verify competent performance to meet the requirements specified in the national occupational standards. In these situations, assessment details will be included in information contained in the unit databank so that users are aware of any specific assessment requirements and the implications this may have for credit accumulation and transfer opportunities.
- endorsement of the unit by a sector or other appropriate body (where required)
- the location of the unit within the subject/sector classification system
- the name of the awarding body submitting the unit.

Information on the IT requirements for submitting information using the pro forma will be discussed with participants prior to the commencement of the tests and trials.

The tests and trials will explore possible links between the unit databank and the National Occupational Standards Directory. They will also examine how best to express the relationship between a unit and a national occupational standard or other type of standard or curricula in a way that is meaningful to users and supports processes for agreeing credit transfer.

A single version of the pro forma will be used during the tests and trials. However, the data fields for the unit information may be revised during the two-year period of trialling, as a result of feedback from awarding bodies and other users. The ability of the information specified through the pro forma to support the development of a stable credit accumulation and transfer system and provide greater clarity to users about units will also be evaluated.

## Qualifications

### 18 *Key features*

- 18.1 Each qualification must have a set of rules of combination that specifies the credits that need to be achieved through particular units for the qualification to be awarded.
- 18.2 Each qualification must have a level and a unique title that indicates the size of the qualification through the use of the terms award, certificate and diploma. The latter requirement relating to size will be specifically tested.
- 18.3 Each qualification specification must indicate whether any of the additional requirements for assessment of individual units are to be applied.

### 19 *Qualification titles*

- 19.1 The title must be unique and explicitly reflect the purpose of the qualification. Awarding bodies will be required to use the following format:
- qualification level
  - qualification size (for example award, certificate, diploma)
  - details indicating the qualification content.
- 19.2 The name of the awarding body offering the qualification will not be included within the rules of combination for the qualification, **but will** be included in the information submitted for accreditation and information for users. It will appear on qualification certificates. The ability for awarding bodies to brand qualifications remains and this will be tested in relation to submitting and awarding within the test and trials.
- 19.3 The level of a qualification is determined by reviewing the rules of combination for the qualification and identifying the level at which there is the greatest number of credits. For the testing and trialling phase, at least 60 percent of credits must be at the same level as the qualification.

19.4 It is proposed that the size of a qualification will be signalled through the use of the terms award, certificate and diploma. These terms are being introduced to provide greater clarity to users about the relative sizes of qualifications.

19.5 The table below sets out initial proposals for the range of credit values associated with the terms award, certificate and diploma.

Title	Award	Certificate	Diploma
Credit value	From 1 to 12	From 13 to 36	Above 36

19.6 An important area for testing and evaluation will be the use of these common size descriptors and the appropriateness of the range of credit values associated with the terms Award, Certificate and Diploma. Recommendations on the use of these descriptors will follow from testing this approach in 2006-07.

## **20 *Developing qualifications***

20.1 Once a need for a particular qualification has been identified (for example through a provision planning tool such as a sector qualification strategy), awarding bodies will construct qualifications by developing new units, by revising existing units or by selecting units from the unit databank that support the rationale for the proposed qualification.

20.2 Where the units selected are the responsibility of another awarding body and form part of the mandatory or optional units of the proposed qualification, permission to use the units must be sought from the relevant awarding body. The regulatory authorities will work with awarding bodies to develop protocols to support this process.

20.3 If accompanied by an appropriate rationale, qualifications comprising single units will be permitted. The impact of single unit qualifications on the framework in terms of possible restrictions on flexibility, transferability and portability will be evaluated.

20.4 Awarding bodies will specify, in consultation with appropriate bodies, any prerequisites that learners have to meet for the qualification. These entry requirements could include achievement of particular units or qualifications or specific work experience requirements.

## **21 Submitting qualifications for accreditation**

- 21.1 Awarding bodies will develop rules of combination and, where relevant, the arrangements for assessment of the qualification (as set out in 18.3 above). These details, along with other information about the qualification (similar to that required under the NQF 5 day accreditation process), will be submitted electronically for accreditation.
- 21.2 The regulatory authorities will build on the existing web-based accreditation system to develop the new accreditation process to support the framework.
- 21.3 Further guidance on the accreditation requirements will be produced for the tests and trials.

## **22 Rules of combination**

- 22.1 Rules of combination for qualifications will be specified by awarding bodies in consultation with other organisations, and must be consistent, where appropriate with relevant sector-strategic or other planning provision requirements. The rules will state:
- the title of the qualification
  - total credit value of the qualification
  - minimum number of credits that must be achieved at each level
  - any mandatory units
  - any optional units
  - minimum number of credits that must be achieved through mandatory and optional units at each level
  - required and excluded combinations of optional units
  - whether credits from 'other' units count towards the achievement of the qualification
  - whether credits from other qualifications and awarding bodies that can be transferred towards the qualification
  - any time limits on credit accumulation
  - exemption arrangements.
- 22.2 A template for specifying Rules of Combination, to be used during the trials and revised as necessary, is attached as annex B. The template is a paper representation of an electronic form that will be included within the accreditation process for the new framework

and will be subjected to trialling.

22.3 The regulatory authorities will produce further guidance on the development of rules of combination within the agreed format, prior to the beginning of tests and trials. This guidance will be developed in collaboration with potential users of the framework.

#### **Testing and trialling requirement**

Awarding bodies will need to demonstrate that they have effective processes in place to develop rules of combination that:

- are consistent with the rationale of the qualification and requirements of the relevant provision planning tool for which they are developed
- ensure the qualification provides opportunities for progression to further learning and/or further qualifications and/or work or employment
- ensure that learners are offered a meaningful and coherent combination of units through which credits may be achieved
- facilitate and promote the process of credit accumulation and transfer to an extent consistent with the rationale of the qualification
- present appropriate opportunities for learners to claim exemption from some credit achievement on the basis of awards gained outside the framework
- comply with any sector strategic or other provision planning tool requirements
- comply with any particular requirements of industry regulators or other parties with an interest in the qualification
- are endorsed, as appropriate, by relevant third parties as meeting the needs of a particular workforce, industry or group of learners
- place no unnecessary barriers to credit or qualification achievement by learners in relation to the framework's commitment to equality and diversity.

Awarding bodies will be required to record details of these processes and their outcomes for evaluation purposes.

## **23 Assessment requirements**

- 23.1 Assessment method(s) should be appropriate for the unit characteristics and should result in valid, reliable and consistent assessment that is appropriate to the assessment criteria of the unit.
- 23.2 All units must be capable of being individually assessed. This does not mean that all units must be separately assessed. Awarding bodies may develop assessment arrangements that are common to a number of units, and centres may design assessment activities that relate to the learning outcomes of more than one unit. This flexibility will need to be informed by, and take account of, any assessment requirements for units set out in the unit pro forma by a sector, regulatory or other relevant body.
- 23.3 The availability of unit assessment must enable learners to claim credit for their achievements if they decide to leave a programme of learning prior to completion of the qualification.

## **24 Grading**

- 24.1 Trials will review existing grading models to evaluate whether it would be desirable to have a single model for all units and qualifications or a range of approaches to grading. We expect projects within the test and trial period to investigate grading arrangements and grading criteria.
- 24.2 Grading criteria may relate to a whole qualification or to components of a qualification. A component of a qualification may comprise of a single unit, selected units or a cluster of units.
- 24.3 The regulatory authorities will test whether within a qualification or a qualification with several endorsed pathways it is possible to ensure the following:
- The integrity of credit awards is maintained. This means that all arrangements for grading of components must ensure that credit can be awarded for individual units within the components.
  - The integrity of the level descriptors is maintained. Any criteria for the grading of components must be identified within the level of the unit(s) on which the component is based. This means that components may not be based on units at more than one level.

- The integrity of learning outcomes as statements of knowledge, skills and understanding is maintained.
- The operation of the system of credit accumulation and transfer is not compromised. Awarding bodies cannot deny the right of learners to transfer credits from ungraded to graded, or between differently graded, qualifications.
- Learners' abilities to transfer credits to other learning contexts and employment are not compromised.

24.4 Grading criteria must be explicit and submitted for accreditation as part of the information about a qualification.

### **Award, accumulation, transfer and recording of credits (as the basis for initial testing and trials from 2006)**

#### **25 Key features**

- 25.1 Credit is awarded for unit achievement, against an explicit unit with specified learning outcomes. All awarding bodies will be required to have systems in place that enable them to award credit(s) to those learners who wish to claim an award of credit(s) for the achievement of one or more unit.
- 25.2 Credits will be awarded to learners irrespective of whether or not they achieve, or wish to achieve, a full qualification. Where learners do aim to achieve a qualification, they will do so through the process of credit accumulation.
- 25.3 Credits will also be transferred between qualifications and awarding bodies. All awarding bodies will mutually recognise the credits awarded by all other awarding bodies operating within the framework in order to support credit transfer. However, the ability of learners to accumulate and transfer credits will be determined by the rules of combination of any qualification(s) they wish to achieve.
- 25.4 This system of credit accumulation and transfer (CAT) will operate across all qualifications within the framework. This is a critical area of test and trials.

#### **26 The learner achievement record**

- 26.1 Each learner will have a learner achievement record (LAR), which is a single electronic record that lists an individual's credit and qualification achievements.

- 26.2 During the period from April 2006 to September 2006, detailed work with those awarding bodies proposing to be involved in trialling the LAR will be undertaken in relation to approaches and prototypes. The *Test and trial prospectus* sets out the process for engaging with this activity.
- 26.3 The LAR will not award qualifications or credits – this responsibility will remain with awarding bodies.
- 26.4 A learner will be able to claim credit once they have achieved one or more unit(s). The body awarding credit will be responsible for recording it in the ‘credit transcript’ section of the LAR.
- 26.5 A separate section of the LAR will record the qualifications achieved by a learner. The body awarding the qualification will be responsible for ensuring that all the qualification requirements have been met, namely that the rules of combination, assessment requirements and other requirements for the qualification have been adhered to, and any exemptions granted to a learner have been recorded.
- 26.6 The LAR will be the authoritative record of learner achievement within the framework and will be supported by a unique learner number (ULN). It will be for individual awarding bodies to decide whether to issue a paper-based certificate to supplement the record of credits awarded within the LAR. Initially awarding bodies will still be required to produce a paper-based certificate to recognise qualification and unit achievement.
- 26.7 Once the LAR is fully functional, testing will establish whether this should continue to be a requirement or a decision to be taken by individual awarding bodies. Until a functioning LAR is developed, awarding bodies will be required to produce a certificate to recognise credit achievement where this is requested by a learner.

### **Testing and trialling requirements**

Awarding bodies will need to demonstrate that they have systems in place to ensure that:

- credit is awarded to learners once the achievement of the learning outcomes of a specified unit(s) have been confirmed
- qualifications are awarded to learners once confirmation has been received that the rules of combination, assessment and any other requirements have been met.

As the prototype of the LAR develops, awarding bodies will need to develop processes for recording the award of credit and qualifications within the LAR. The systems should ensure that information on credits and qualifications is recorded securely, accurately and quickly once awarding processes are complete.

Awarding bodies will record details of these processes for evaluation purposes.

## **27 Transferring credits**

27.1 There are six mechanisms through which the system of credit transfer will operate during the test and trial period:

- transferring credits between the same unit shared by more than one qualification
- transferring credits between units with identical titles identified within the unit bank
- transferring credits between units with similar titles identified through excluded combinations of units
- transferring credits between units of equivalent value identified within rules of combination
- transferring credits through the identification of 'other units' within rules of combination
- transferring credits on the basis of a claim from an individual learner outside those set out in the rules of combination.

27.2 The regulatory authorities will produce further guidance on the operation of each of these mechanisms for credit transfer prior to the commencement of tests and trials of the framework.

### **Testing and trialling requirements**

All awarding bodies will need to have arrangements in place to ensure that all credits that fall within the rules of combination for the 'receiving' qualification are recognised, irrespective of the awarding body that recorded the credit achievement in the LAR.

The regulatory authorities will work with awarding bodies throughout the test and trial period to establish appropriate procedures for mutual recognition of credits within the framework to ensure that learner achievements are appropriately 'counted' towards qualifications.

## **Centres**

### **28 Centre requirements**

28.1 Centre recognition for the framework will be the responsibility of awarding bodies.

28.2 During the test and trial period the regulatory authorities will work with awarding bodies and centres to evaluate the desirability of developing a set of general requirements and quality assurance arrangements that all centres will have to demonstrate they can meet before being approved by awarding bodies to offer units and qualifications within the framework. This will build on current arrangements and be informed by the outcomes of the Centre Recognition Project and other quality development initiatives.

28.3 The regulatory authorities will produce further guidance prior to the commencement of tests and trials that sets out in more detail the responsibilities of both awarding bodies and centres in ensuring that the working specification can be applied consistently and effectively in the delivery of learning and assessment opportunities leading to awards within the framework.

## Annex A: Unit pro forma

<b>Title:</b>	
<b>Level:</b>	
<b>Credit value:</b>	
<b>Learning outcomes</b> <i>The learner will:</i>	<b>Assessment criteria</b> <i>The learner can:</i>
1.	1.1 1.2
2.	2.1 2.2
3. etc	3.1 3.2 etc
<b>Additional information about the unit</b>	
Unit aim(s)	
Unit expiry date	
Details of the relationship between the unit and relevant national occupational standards (if appropriate)	
Details of the relationship between the unit and other standards or curricula (if appropriate)	
Assessment requirements specified by a sector or regulatory body (if appropriate)	
Endorsement of the unit by a sector or other appropriate body (if required)	
Location of the unit within the subject/sector classification system	
Name of the organisation submitting the unit	
Availability for use	

## Annex B: Electronic rules of combination template

This is a paper-based representation of initial thinking about what an electronic rules of combination template will look like.

<b>Overall information</b>	
Qualification title	
Total credit value of qualification	
Minimum number of credits that must be achieved at each level	

<b>Mandatory units</b>			
Total credit value of mandatory units that must be achieved at each level			
<b>List of mandatory units</b>			
Unit code	Title	Level	Credit

<b>Optional units</b>			
Minimum number of credits from optional units that must be achieved at each level			
<b>List of optional units (grouped in sets, if appropriate)</b>			
Unit code	Title	Level	Credit
<b>Required and excluded combinations of optional units</b>			

<b>Credits from other units (specify parameters to be applied)</b>

<b>Time limits on credit accumulation</b>		
Code	Unit title	Time limit

<b>Exemption arrangements</b>		
Code	Unit title	Exemption

***Credits from other qualifications and awarding bodies that can be transferred towards the qualification***