



# **Developing a Personalised Curriculum for Alternative Provision**

A whitepaper for providers of learning  
to the 14-19 age group

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## Introduction

Plans are underway to reform education and training for young people from the age of 14. Schools should be working with Local Authority 14-19 strategy advisers to ensure their offer meets the requirements of the new emerging reforms.

The overarching focus is to provide a personalised curriculum for each and every learner at a level appropriate to that learner.

**Promoting achievement, valuing success: a strategy for 14-19 qualifications**, published in March 2008 by the Department for Children, Schools and Families, comments that.....

.... we know that if we are to recognise fully the talents of every young person and equip them with the higher level skills they need to succeed in the global economy, we must also make fundamental changes to the 14-19 qualification offer. We need to do still more to attract increasing numbers of young people to learning, transform standards in the basics and in the wider skills for employability, and enable all young people to be taking qualifications that have a real standing with employers and the public at large, establishing a strong progression route to Further and Higher Education. This is an essential part of our plan to raise the education and training leaving age to 18 by 2015, so that all young people have the right skills to meet the demands of a rapidly changing world and can continue learning throughout life.

We have set out a very significant programme of reform for 14-19 education, with a new set of qualification opportunities at its heart. We are committed to delivering these reforms in practice, together with a range of key partners at every level.

A well defined qualifications framework is key to enabling all qualifications to be understood by learners, employers and all other interested parties. Moving to a single credit-based framework for all 14-19 qualifications – presenting them in a way that is easier to understand, through comparing not only the level but also the size of different qualifications – could have significant benefits for young learners, supporting progression from one route to another and into adult learning.

There is currently widespread anticipation that a new credit-based qualification framework will be confirmed later this summer as a successor to the National Qualifications Framework (NQF).

This paper helps you to understand how to create a personalised curriculum for alternative provision using credit-based qualifications from within the emerging Qualification and Credit Framework<sup>1</sup> (QCF). The QCF will represent a significant change to how qualifications are designed.

## The QCA and the QCF

The architecture of the new QCF, as defined by the Qualification and Curriculum Authority (QCA), outlines the comparisons in challenge and size of all qualifications from Level 1 to Level 8. See figure 1 below:

Figure 1: The Simple Architecture of the Qualifications and Credit Framework<sup>2</sup>



The new 14-19 Diplomas, as well as the parallel development of the Foundation Learning Tier (FLT) will all adopt the QCF specification, and discussions continue about whether GCSEs and A levels will also be included over time.

The FLT in particular identifies a series of pathways through which learners can progress to further study, qualifications or independent living. This is geared to learners working at levels below Level 2. Alongside the need for provision at levels below Level 2, schools and colleges have the concern of attracting points for the Achievement and Attainment Tables.

Going forward, qualifications accredited within the QCF, such as Skills Towards Enabling Progression (Step-UP) from the National Open College Network (NOCN), will attract performance points alongside GCSEs – see Appendix II for points equivalence of Step-UP qualifications.

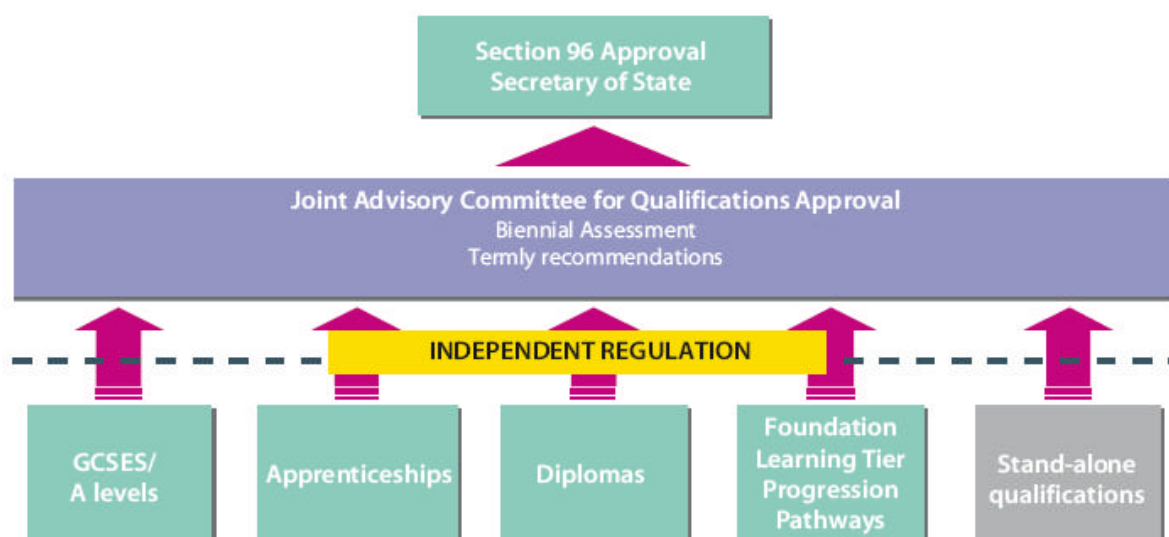
## Alternative Provision

Traditionally, education outside of school, when it is arranged by local authorities or the schools themselves, is called “Alternative Provision”. It can range from pupil referral units and further education colleges to voluntary or private sector projects.

However, alternative provision can also be used to describe arrangements by schools to offer curriculum flexibility at Key Stage 4 (the 14 to 16 age group) linked to the attainment of a qualification. This may include extended work experience, programmes of vocational or work-related learning with external providers including the voluntary and community sectors. Pupils remain on the roll of their school, and the costs of the placement will generally be met from school budgets.

The FLT will form part of the new structure. See figure 2 below:

Figure 2: Proposed new Section 96 approval process<sup>3</sup>



It will provide clear routes, called Progression Pathways, for young people working below level 2 to achieve combinations of qualifications at Entry level and Level 1 that will prepare them fully for level 2 and beyond.

The three Progression Pathways for the 14-19 age group are:

**Foundation Diploma or GCSE Pathway:** This pathway will support all 14-19 year-olds who are working predominately at Entry level and will also include the potential for level 1 achievement. It is intended to provide progression to the Foundation Diploma or GCSEs.

**Skilled Work Pathway (Apprenticeship):** This pathway will support 16-18 year-olds who are working predominately at level 1, and will also include the potential for level 2 achievement where appropriate. It is mainly intended to provide progression to an Apprenticeship.

**Independent living or supported employment Pathway:** This pathway has been designed for 16 to 25 year-old learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities who wish to move to independent living or supported employment.

Implementation will begin on a small scale from September 2008, and will be delivered in a phased approach to 2011. From that point the expectation is that publicly funded provision at Entry level and level 1 for 14-19 year-olds will be delivered through one of the Progression Pathways, or through the Foundation Diploma. However, in some cases, there may be a need to retain some agreed stand-alone provision at Entry level and level 1.

NOCN has over 25 years experience of designing and accrediting credit-based qualifications. This experience combined with an in-depth knowledge of the emerging QCF and FLT, has enabled us to develop credit-based qualifications that are flexible enough to meet the needs of many learners for whom alternative provision is the best way forward.

## Personalised Curriculum

Changes to the key stage 4 national curriculum have increased the flexibility available to schools and Local Authorities in ensuring the curriculum entitlement of all students. The focus on more secure and varied pathways within the 14–19 group will increase the range of learning opportunities open to young people and present them all as positive options where success and progression are achievable.

By themselves, these changes will not solve all the problems experienced by learners who are underachieving or disengaged, or those whose medical or other needs or level of mobility make it difficult to access learning or cause them to reject learning, but they do change the context for alternative provision.

Inclusive education aims to respond to and anticipate diverse learner characteristics. Most of these students are possibly unable to access the mainstream curriculum because of the gap between what they need and what is available at the time, not because of any deficiency in themselves.

Principles for planning a personalised curriculum can be found in Appendix II.

All students are entitled to have their achievements recognised and described in a way that others can understand. Accreditation through approved and, therefore, transferable qualifications offers a means of recognising, recording, communicating and celebrating achievement and can be positive for the learner in a variety of ways. It can:

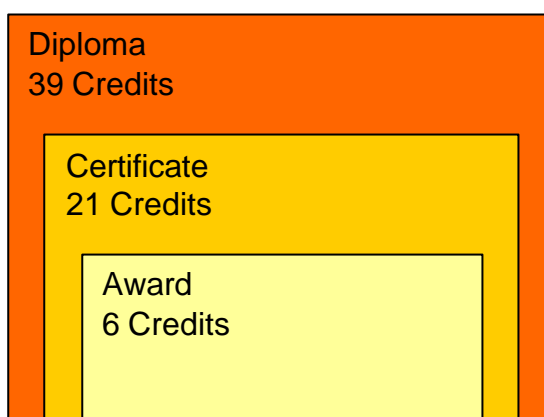
- enhance self-esteem
- increase motivation
- confirm that targets have been met
- confirm the level or standard attained
- communicate attainment and so help progression into further learning, training or employment.

The following section describes the qualifications designed by NOCN to meet these needs.

## Skills Towards Enabling Progression: Step-UP

Step-UP is a suite of qualifications designed by NOCN to address the needs of learners between the ages of 14 and 19. The nesting of units – see diagram 3 - within the three progression qualifications of Step-UP: Award, Certificate and Diploma, allow for different sizes/length of programmes as well as flexible delivery over different time periods according to the needs of both the learner and provider.

Diagram 3: Nested units at Level 1



This leads to the easy design of a personalised curriculum for each learner in a cohort and gives the opportunity to meet the needs of a wide range of learners using units covering:

- **Functional skills** – e.g. Writing for Meaning, Using Calculations, Using the Internet
- **Personal development** - e.g. Assertiveness and Decision Making, Using Teamwork Skills
- **Vocational tasters** - e.g. Construction, Business, Childcare
- **Employability skills** - e.g. Personal Career Planning, Work Based Placement

Qualifications can also have a spiky profile. Units at entry and Level 1 can be combined in a single qualification according to the needs of the learner. Examples can be found in the publication: **Guide to Post-14 Vocational Pathways using NOCN Step-UP Qualifications**.

In addition, the same unit can be taught to several learners following different targeted outcomes. For example:

The **NOCN Level 1 Step-UP Award** contains 6 credits:

Making Choices in Pursuit of Personal Goals	Credit value	3
Improving Spelling Skills	Credit value	3

Adding the following units to this qualification to a total of 21 credits combines to trigger the **NOCN Level 1 Step-UP Certificate**:

NOCN Level 1 Step-UP Award	Credit value	6
plus		
Personal Awareness	Credit value	3
Demonstrating Speaking and Listening Skills	Credit value	3
Healthy Living	Credit value	3
Using Teamwork Skills	Credit value	3
Personal Career Planning	Credit value	3

These units can also be combined to offer a wide range of vocational pathway qualifications at each level. The units are also mapped at both levels to the outcomes of the Every Child Matters agenda.

Sample pathways and ECM mapping can also be found in the publication: **Guide to Post-14 Vocational Pathways using NOCN Step-UP Qualifications**.

## Summary

In summary, using qualifications such as Step-UP from NOCN can enable a school or college to develop a personalised curriculum for each learner regardless of their expected level of attainment.

Step-UP qualifications have been designed to engage learners to identify their personal interests and strengths for progression to further study. Each unit completed, being part of the QCF, will be accredited and contribute towards a current or future qualification thus motivating them to continue learning.

The pathways identified within the FLT provide clear routes for young people working below level 2 to achieve combinations of qualifications at Entry level and Level 1 that will prepare them fully for level 2 and beyond.

These pathways will not only attract funding from the LA/LSC but the qualifications within them will contribute points for Achievement and Attainment Tables.

For more information, or to discuss Step-UP implementation further please contact:

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## Appendices and notes

Notes:

<sup>1</sup> The Qualification and Credit Framework is due to be fully implemented in August 2008

<sup>2</sup> diagram courtesy Qualification and Curriculum Authority

<sup>3</sup> diagram from Promoting achievement, valuing success: a strategy for 14-19 qualifications published by DCSF, March 2008

## Appendix I: Step-UP qualifications- Performance Measures

The following table details the point score that each qualification attracts towards Achievement and Attainment tables for schools and colleges.

NOCN Entry Level Award in Skills Towards Enabling Progression (Step-UP) (Entry3) (QCF) 500/3917/9

Grade	Point Score
Pass	3.50

NOCN Entry Level Certificate in Skills Towards Enabling Progression (Step-UP) (Entry 3) (QCF) 500/3919/2

Grade	Point Score
Pass	14.00

NOCN Entry Level Diploma in Skills Towards Enabling Progression (Step-UP) (Entry 3) (QCF) 500/3993/3

Grade	Point Score
Pass	28.00

NOCN Level 1 Award in Skills Towards Enabling Progression (Step-UP) (QCF) 500/3918/0

Contribution to the Level 1 Threshold	Grade	Point Score
10%	Pass	12.50

NOCN Level 1 Certificate in Skills Towards Enabling Progression (Step-UP) (QCF) 500/3916/7

Contribution to the Level 1 Threshold	Grade	Point Score
40%	Pass	50.00

NOCN Level 1 Diploma in Skills Towards Enabling Progression (Step-UP) (QCF) 500/3830/8

Contribution to the Level 1 Threshold	Grade	Point Score
80%	Pass	100.00

### Approved Qualification Points Scores

(Dept for Children, Schools and Families website:  
[http://dcsf.gov.uk/performance/tables/nscoring\\_sys.shtml](http://dcsf.gov.uk/performance/tables/nscoring_sys.shtml))

Level 1

Grade	Points
D	34
E	28
F	22
G	16

Further details of the qualifications can be found on the National Database of Accredited

Qualifications – NDAQ, [www.accreditedqualifications.org.uk](http://www.accreditedqualifications.org.uk)

## ***Appendix II: Principles for planning the curriculum***

- 1 Develop the curriculum as a coherent whole, using subjects and other areas of learning as contexts for developing the skills and attributes essential to continued learning and participation.
- 2 Use assessment information systematically to shape the curriculum to ensure it can provide personalised, developmentally-appropriate learning for all.
- 3 Provide a range of learning opportunities, matched to students' needs, interests and aspirations, which capitalise on the strengths, resources and expertise within the alternative setting.
- 4 Plan from the point of admission, for positive outcomes and progression onwards from the alternative setting and onwards from key stage 4.
- 5 Provide a range of accreditation opportunities that match the planned learning outcomes and progression options, and which have currency with FE providers, employers and the wider community. Such opportunities will aid a student's subsequent reintegration into the mainstream.
- 6 Establish partnerships between students, their parents/carers and other relevant agencies to plan, support and review students' learning and progress and the appropriateness of their curriculum.
- 7 Analyse student performance data and other evidence to monitor the progress of all learners and take action where increased progress is not evident.

Extracted from:

Designing a personalised curriculum for alternative provision at key stage 4 published by the QCA.

### Appendix III: Glossary of terms

Assessment Criteria	The evidence required to prove that a learner has achieved a learning outcome.
Award, Certificate, Diploma	Progressive levels of attainment for example: <b>Level 2 Award for Progression</b> , the learner must achieve 12 unit credits with at least 3 core unit credits. <b>Level 2 Certificate for Progression</b> , the learner must achieve 18 unit credits with at least 3 core unit credits. <b>Level 2 Diploma for Progression</b> , the learner must achieve 33 unit credits with at least 6 core unit credits.
Core units / credits	Compulsory units / credits within a qualification. One credit is 10 hours of learning time. A unit may have a value of more than one credit.
Credit-based learning	Credit is an award made to a learner for the achievement of learning outcomes at a particular level. A credit-based approach enables the operation of credit accumulation and transfer by the learner.
FLT	Foundation Learning Tier – an inclusive programme to develop a strategic approach to Entry and Level 1 achievement.
GLH	Guided Learning Hours
NDAQ	National Database of Accredited Qualifications
NOCN	National Open College Network
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
OCN	Open College Network
OCN Eastern Region	the OCN with a regional focus for Norfolk, Suffolk, Essex, Hertfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Bedfordshire.
PP	Progression Pathways – guidelines for the development of qualifications within the FLT
QCA	Qualifications and Curriculum Authority
QCF	Qualifications and Credit Framework – a new way of recognising achievement through the award of credit for unit of learning and qualifications.
QfP	Qualifications for Progression – a NOCN-developed scheme of credit-based units
Rules of combination	The rules by which a qualification is constructed from core and optional units.

Spiky profile	The ability to combine credits at different levels within a pathway.
Step-Up Qualifications	Qualifications developed by NOCN within the QCF for 14+ learners
Unit	A unit of learning with formal outcomes and assessment criteria with an assigned credit value; developed following an agreed template.

### ***Appendix IV: Useful links***

OCN Eastern Region:

[www.ocner.org.uk](http://www.ocner.org.uk)

National Open College Network:

[www.nocn.org.uk](http://www.nocn.org.uk)

Qualifications & Curriculum Authority QCF site: [http://www.qca.org.uk/qca\\_8150.aspx](http://www.qca.org.uk/qca_8150.aspx)

Qualifications & Curriculum Authority FLT site: [www.qca.org.uk/flt](http://www.qca.org.uk/flt)

The Learning & Skills Council FLT website: <http://qfr.lsc.gov.uk/flt/>

LSC Qualifications and Reform site: [www.lsc.gov.uk/whatwedo/qfr.htm](http://www.lsc.gov.uk/whatwedo/qfr.htm)

QIA Excellence Gateway: [www.excellence.qia.org.uk/page.aspx?o=flt](http://www.excellence.qia.org.uk/page.aspx?o=flt)

National Database of Accredited Qualifications [www.ndaq.org.uk](http://www.ndaq.org.uk)





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