

ITQ Assessment Strategy

England, Wales and Northern Ireland

This document sets out the ITQ assessment strategy appropriate for England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Arrangements for Scotland are published separately. Changes from the existing arrangements are summarised at the end of the document.

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1 Introduction

1.1 Background to the new ITQ Framework

The 2008 development of the National Occupational Standards (NOS) for Using IT and this associated assessment strategy are a key tool in the planned delivery of the Sector Skills Agreement for IT (SSA).

The SSA is uniting employers, educators, government and others to create a coherent strategy for IT skills based on a common, employer-led plan of action, that will transform the IT skills landscape such that:

- > All organisations in every sector will be fully realising the potential of IT to help drive their business goals, so that the UK is a world leader in its exploitation of IT for innovation, service and business competitiveness.
- > All individuals in the UK will have - and will continue to develop - the IT user skills necessary to fully participate in the e-economy.
- > IT user skills will enhance individuals' employability, social lives and ability to benefit from online services.

World class research cited in the Qualifying for the Information Age – the e-skills UK Sector Qualification and Learning Strategy¹ (SQLS) identifies, that workers in virtually all occupations need to be able to use more sophisticated IT systems more effectively to create new sources of customer value. Users will not only need increased levels of skills in basic desk top technology; they will also increasingly need to be skilled in security management and IT support processes and tools, and also the use of communications and mobile technologies.

The SSA for IT sets out a clear target state for stakeholders delivering and beneficiaries receiving better IT user skills:

- > A simplified, flexible framework for recognising achievement in IT skills operates across the UK, throughout both the education system and industry.

The SQLS, together with the associated Action Plan, designed to deliver on the SSA, identifies the following principle² for delivering on this target.

- > Principle 4: The ITQ Framework will be used to organise and position learning and qualifications within the coherent environment. All IT user qualifications and learning will be recorded through a recognised Record of Achievement

This means that:

¹ Available for download at: www.e-skills.com/SQLS

² See SQLS (e-skills UK, 4th April 2008) page 5.

- All IT User qualification and learning will be based on common unit descriptions directly aligned to the National Occupational Standards for IT Users and encompassed in the ITQ Framework.
- Qualifications and learning are described in a consistent way, which is understood by employers and learners.
- Learners at all stages will engage with a common environment that will enable seamless progression.
- There is recognition and central aggregation of all individuals' elements of learning and achievement within a formal record that is meaningful to employers.
- Funding agencies are able to monitor achievement and return on investment.

The National Occupational Standards (NOS) for Using IT and enhancement of the flexibility of the ITQ both in terms of content and how it is delivered will form a major part of the implementation of the SQLS for IT users. This will enable further alignment of all IT user qualifications and learning with the NOS, within the ITQ Framework.

1.2 Qualifications and Credit Framework

The ITQ Framework is designed to support the development of IT user qualifications, based on units of credit, for accreditation onto the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF)³, which is a new way of recognising skills and qualifications. The QCF does this by awarding credit for qualifications and units (small steps of learning). It enables people to gain qualifications at their own pace along flexible routes.

This new approach is anticipated to deliver the following benefits.

For learners the QCF will:

- > offer more freedom, choice and flexibility
- > give easy access to information about the commitment needed for different routes to achievement, letting learners balance that commitment with family, work and other responsibilities
- > allow them to build up credits at their own pace and combine them in a way that will help them get where they want to be
- > enable them to transfer credits between qualifications to avoid having to repeat learning
- > record all their achievements on an electronic learner record, encouraging them and others to value their past achievements.

³ For more information about the QCF visit the following link on the QCA website: www.qca.org.uk/QCF. The ITQ Framework is also designed to fit the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF).

For learning providers (schools, colleges, training providers, workplaces) the QCF will:

- > enable them to design more flexible programmes, suitable to the individual needs of learners
- > help them improve retention and progression rates by recognising smaller steps of achievement
- > track all learners' achievements through the use of a unique learner number (ULN) and an individual's electronic learner record, giving providers standard information about each learner's past achievements
- > help them describe achievements to employers and learners in a language that is easy to understand.

For employers the QCF will:

- > help them to measure quickly the level and size of achievements of prospective employees
- > enable them to get in-house training recognised within a national framework
- > describe levels of achievement in terms everyone can understand
- > make training options and pathways clear, helping employees and employers find the right training for their learning and business needs.

The regulatory arrangements for the QCF set out the following aims and design principles for accredited qualifications.

The aim of the QCF is to support the establishment, maintenance and continuing development of a qualifications system that is:

- > inclusive – able to recognise the achievements of all learners at any level and in any area of learning
- > responsive – enabling individuals and employers to establish routes to achievement that are appropriate to their needs, and recognized organisations to develop units and qualifications in response to demand
- > accessible – building a system based on clear design features that are easy for all users to understand
- > non-bureaucratic – based on mutual trust and confidence, supported by a robust and proportionate approach to regulation and quality assurance.

The QCF is designed to provide a structure within which:

- > unit-based qualifications can be located

- > achievements are recognised through the award of credits and qualifications
- > the level and size of achievements can be easily identified
- > the mechanisms necessary to allow the accumulation and transfer of credits between qualifications and awarding organisations operate
- > learners are given the maximum flexibility and range of opportunities to progress and receive recognition for their achievements.

1.4 England, Northern Ireland and Wales

The qualifications regulators in England (Ofqual), Wales (DCELLS) and Northern Ireland (CCEA) have been working to design the regulatory arrangements for the QCF⁵, which were published by OfQual in August 2008.

Work towards the QCF has been underpinned in particular by the three country test and trial period for the QCF, and also informed by the following developments undertaken in Northern Ireland and Wales.

1.4.1 The Northern Ireland Credit and Transfer Scheme (NICATS)

The Northern Ireland Credit Accumulation and Transfer System (NICATS)⁶ is a framework, which was developed for to allow learning to be recognised in all its shapes and forms, no matter how it is acquired. It is a set of principles and guidelines, which should allow us to value, describe, measure and recognise all learning. This includes learning in traditional settings such as schools, colleges and universities and also learning within the community and the workplace.

It is based on a set of principles and guidelines which allows:

- > all candidate achievement to be recognised and recorded on a personal Credit Transcript
- > small blocks of learning to be assessed and given credit

Credit provides the basic language for recognising achievement, as a measure of the level of demand of the learning and the amount of learning achieved.

1.4.2 The Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales (CQFW)

The Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales (CQFW)⁷ started in 2003 and is being progressively implemented. The framework merges the concepts of volume of learning achievements (credit) and the demands made by that learning on the learner (level) to create a system that is able to embrace all types and styles of learning, and all qualifications.

⁵ The *Regulatory Arrangements for the Qualifications and Credit Framework*, August 2008 are available to download here.

⁶ Further information about NICATS is available for download here: www.nicats.ac.uk

⁷ Further information about CQFW is available here: Welsh Assembly Government, Educational and Skills, CQFW

The vision for the single CQFW will underpin the following five key goals:

- > enable everyone to develop and maintain essential skills
- > encourage people to become lifelong learners
- > exploit the knowledge in businesses and educational institutions
- > encourage business and workers to gain new skills
- > and help people within their communities to develop new skills.

1.5 Policy changes

The ITQ assessment strategy is designed to support the development of the SQLS principle for an ITQ Framework, by setting out the requirements for an up-to-date IT user qualification based on the NOS, tailored to the needs of businesses and their staff. The ITQ assessment strategy also needs to take account of changes to policy and the qualifications environment as outlined above and the associated assessment requirements. Key changes include the following.

> Credit frameworks

e-skills UK will derive QCF framework units from the NOS in collaboration with Awarding Bodies to meet employers and learners needs and contribute to the ITQ.

> Embedded Functional Skills⁸ [FS] within 14-19 curricula and qualifications

The revised IT User NOS embed the Functional Skills ICT [FS ICT] within the following three areas of competence that relate directly to FS ICT:

- 'IT User fundamentals' [IUF:FS]
- 'IT Communication fundamentals' [ICF:FS]
- 'IT Software fundamentals' [ISF:FS]

> Basic skills

The revised IT User NOS embed ICT Skills for Life and signpost opportunities for naturally occurring numeracy and literacy, within the three areas of competence with embedded FS.

> Personal learning and thinking skills

The revised IT User NOS signpost opportunities for naturally occurring personal, learning and thinking skills [PLTS] within the three areas of competence with embedded Functional Skills [FS] and within the mandatory area of competence 'Improving productivity in using IT'.

> 'Full' level 2 qualification design principles⁹

⁸ Trials with centres and learners commenced in 2007 for ICT Functional Skills in England. ICT Functional Skills standards have been defined from Entry 1 to Level 2. The ICT Functional Skills standards are comparable to the ICT Essential Skills standards in Northern Ireland and to the ICT Skills for Life standards in England.

The revised ITQ has been designed to take account of the proposed credit value of more than 13 credits for a full level 2 qualification.

> Foundation Learning Tier¹⁰

The revised ITQ framework has also been designed to take account of the proposed progression pathways for the Foundation Learning Tier, through allowing for the inclusion of FS Mathematics and English, and also for personal, learning and thinking skills [PLTS].

1.6 Principles of ITQ suite of qualifications

Three principles underpin the proposed ITQ suite of qualifications.

1 Flexibility of approach in response to sector, employer and learner needs:

- > for sectors – to tailor and contextualise IT training both to reflect the increasing diversity of job roles and the use of specific systems and software
- > for employers – to ensure skills application and development enables practical exploitation of the potential of IT for business improvement
- > for learners – to ensure they are equipped with the appropriate skills to support their personal or career development.

2 Flexibility of content – to stimulate and inspire new learning and support progression, the ITQ offers a range of solutions varying in:

- > size – from taster courses and bite-sized units to full-time programmes of study
- > level of complexity – from Entry Level to Level 3
- > content – incorporating a range of options for different IT systems and applications.

3 Flexibility of assessment method as appropriate to the individual and the unit, which minimises the assessment burden for learners. The ITQ can therefore accommodate both:

- > electronic testing using simulation, tests and tasks
- > portfolio-based evidence demonstrating the application of skills, knowledge and understanding.

⁹ QCA, April 2008

¹⁰ Currently 4 progression pathways have been defined for FLT in England.

2 ITQ Assessment strategy

This assessment strategy is being developed in consultation with employers, training providers, awarding bodies and the regulatory authorities.

2.1 Scope of the assessment strategy

This assessment strategy applies to all units and qualifications that are aligned to the IT User NOS and accredited onto credit frameworks to be included in the final ITQ Framework (both directly and partly aligned).

During the transition period, the assessment arrangements for existing 'contributing' units and NQF qualifications will apply.

2.2 Choice of assessment method

All ITQ units may be assessed using any method, or combination of methods, which clearly demonstrates that the learning outcomes and assessment criteria have been met. Assessments must also take into account the additional information provided in the unit Purpose and Aims relating to the level of demand of

- > the activity, task, problem or question and the context in which it is set;
- > the information input and output type and structure involved; and
- > the IT tools, techniques or functions to be used.

Examples of recommended assessment methods are included in Annex A:

2.3 Mandatory unit assessment

In order to reflect the standards of competence expected by employers, assessment of the mandatory unit (Improving Productivity using IT) within Certificates and Diplomas must demonstrate that candidates can apply their relevant skills and knowledge to develop a specified outcome, product or solution. The candidate must independently determine, select and apply the necessary IT tools and techniques to achieve their goal.

The assessment design must cover the following aspects:

- > **Objectives for using IT** – understanding the context in which IT is to be used or the conditions that may affect the way IT is to be used; understanding what outcome needs to be developed, and the expectations and requirements that the outcome must meet;
- > **Application of IT skills and knowledge** – understanding what is involved in a piece of work and the best way to get it done;
- > **Evaluation of the use of IT** – being able to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the use of IT, including identifying improvements to inform future work.

2.4 Accreditation of prior achievement (APA)

For candidates starting their studies towards the ITQ under the QCF the process for accreditation of prior achievement is straightforward. Under the QCF, awarding bodies agree to mutual recognition of achievement, so that candidates will be able to count any relevant units towards the ITQ regardless of which awarding body issues the certificates.

Many people may have developed their skills in using IT through undertaking existing or 'legacy' accredited units, qualifications or from non-accredited units and employer training schemes, such as:

- > the QCF ITQ in trials between September 07 and August 09
- > the current ITQ, which is technically a Scottish or National Vocational Qualification [S/NVQ]
- > Functional Skills ICT, ICT Skills for Life [Basic Skills] and in Essential Skills ICT (Northern Ireland);
- > legacy units from VQs or VRQs accredited on the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) or accredited by the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA);
- > vendor units and qualifications; and
- > employer training schemes.

The ITQ Framework lists which units or schemes can contribute to the ITQ, and whether there are any limits on counting credit from such achievement. The up-to-date ITQ Framework, will be published on the e-skills UK website.

Acceptance of contributing qualifications is mandatory for all ITQ Awarding Bodies irrespective of the originating Awarding Body (AB). An Awarding Body offering ITQs must accept recognised units and qualifications from any other AB if the following conditions are met:

- > the candidate presents the original qualification, unit certificate or other agreed record of achievement for inspection by the ITQ centre; and
- > the unit was achieved no more than three years prior to the date of presentation to the centre. It is the responsibility of the AB and their centres to ensure that a representative sample of certificated skills and knowledge are still current.

Some approved contributing units entitle candidates to claim exemptions for more than one ITQ unit. In such cases, the candidate does not have to claim exemptions for all of the possible ITQ units unless he/she chooses to do so.

2.5 Progression

Candidates may carry forward credits for a period of 3 years to support progression from ITQ Award to ITQ Certificate, and from ITQ Certificate to ITQ Diploma or from Level 1 to 2, or Level 2 to 3.

Candidates may not include the same unit at more than 1 level in any qualification. Thus a candidate who has completed, for example, both Word Processing at Level 1 (3 credits) and Word Processing at Level 2 (4 credits) may only count credits from the higher level towards the qualification.

2.6 Assessment roles and quality assurance

2.6.1 Assessors, internal and external moderators/verifiers

The new ITQs are **not** NVQs, therefore there is no need for assessors to hold the A1 qualification, or for verifiers to hold the V1 qualification, or indeed to be working towards these qualifications.

To ensure the quality of assessment decisions, it is expected that awarding bodies will have in place methods to ensure that assessors, internal and external moderators/verifiers have:

- > the necessary IT skills and experience to assess the units and qualifications they are making judgements on, such as demonstrated by holding an ITQ at level 3. Centres must maintain a current register of curriculum vitae (CVs), including reference to continuing professional development.

e-skills UK do not require assessors, internal or external moderators/verifiers to hold assessor qualifications beyond those required by the awarding or regulatory body.

2.6.2 Standardisation, moderation and verification

Awarding Bodies must use quality assurance systems that are fit for purpose for the assessment method(s) being used and are in line with the relevant regulatory requirements.

For example:

- > internal/external moderation of externally set examinations or online tests;
- > external moderation of externally set and internally marked tasks;
- > records to authenticate candidate's evidence for assessment;
- > internal standardisation/ external moderation of scenario based assignments set by centres;
- > internal moderation/verification of internally assessed evidence by a suitably qualified internal moderator/verifier using procedures approved by the awarding body; and
- > external moderation/verification of internally assessed evidence by a suitably qualified external moderator/verifier using procedures specified by the awarding body.

2.7 Joint Awarding Body Forum

Awarding Bodies, through the quality control mechanisms specified by the regulatory authorities, must ensure a rigorous and effective control of centres and the assessment and

verification process so that judgement of what is valid, authentic, current, reliable and sufficient evidence is maintained across all assessment contexts.

To ensure consistency of assessment it is required that all Awarding Bodies routinely participate in the e-skills UK Joint Awarding Body Forum which will be the focus for ensuring that assessment and verification of competence is carried out consistently and fairly across all assessment contexts.

The Awarding Body Forum will, within the individual Awarding Bodies agreed methodologies, develop and maintain a common understanding of the standards and promote good assessment and verification practice.

Annex A Guidance for Awarding Bodies on recommended assessment methods

The following methods are recommended for the assessment of IT User skills, knowledge and understanding for all ITQ units.

- > e-assessment;
- > knowledge tests;
- > scenario-based assessment;
- > portfolio of evidence taken from activities involving the use of contemporary ICT systems;
- > witness testimony;
- > professional discussion;
- > other methods which have been approved by e-skills UK and the Awarding Body.

Whatever method is used, Awarding bodies must have appropriate systems and procedures to:

- > ensure that assessment arrangements meet relevant assessment design principles and quality assurance regulations; and
- > make sample assessment materials available for discussion by the Joint Awarding Body Forum, as required.

A.1 e-Assessment

Online or e-assessment may be used to assess some learning outcomes and assessment criteria relating to performance, knowledge and understanding, for example, of the performance skills in formatting text or understanding of the reasons for choosing different software tools.

Awarding Bodies, employers or providers may develop e-assessments. Where e-assessment is used, Awarding Bodies must ensure that on each assessment occasion:

- > the performance, knowledge and understanding being assessed matches that specified in the relevant ITQ unit;
- > the level is sufficiently challenging; and
- > the assessment methodology used is robust and reliable.

Where employers or providers develop e-assessments, these should be agreed in advance with the Awarding Body.

A.2 Knowledge tests

Knowledge tests, often delivered electronically, can be used to assess some learning outcomes

and assessment criteria relating to knowledge and understanding, for example, knowledge of security risks or organisational guidelines.

Awarding Bodies, employers or providers may develop knowledge tests. Where knowledge tests are used, Awarding Bodies must ensure that on each testing occasion:

- > the knowledge being tested matches that specified in the relevant ITQ unit;
- > the level is sufficiently challenging; and
- > the assessment methodology used is robust and reliable.

Where employers or providers develop knowledge tests, these should be agreed in advance with the awarding body.

A.3 Scenario based assessment

'Scenarios' may be developed to provide a purpose for using IT, which requires the candidate to undertake practical tasks or activities that produce assessable outcomes. Scenarios may be combined with other methods of assessment, for example to provide a purpose for a series of online assessment tasks.

Awarding Bodies, employers or providers may develop scenarios. The scenario and associated tasks must be carefully designed to ensure that:

- > the performance, knowledge and understanding being assessed matches that specified in the relevant ITQ unit;
- > the level is sufficiently challenging; and
- > the demands and constraints result in the purposeful use of IT, and where relevant reflect those that would typically be met in a real work context.

A.4 Portfolio assessment

Valid evidence can arise from:

- > activities undertaken for or at work;
- > the search for employment (e.g. CVs, job applications and emails to potential employers);
- > social activities (e.g. club membership databases, posters and websites), such as:
 - enterprise activities (e.g. business plans, budgets and marketing materials);
 - voluntary activities (e.g. cash flows, programmes and newsletters); or
 - learning and studying subjects other than IT (e.g. internet research for a geography assignment, reports/dissertations and presentations).

By the very nature of IT, activities can be carried out in a variety of locations not confined to the traditional office setting.

Portfolio evidence should arise naturally from tasks and activities involving the use of IT and may include:

- > product outcomes – in the form of outputs or screenshots produced using IT – which should form the majority of evidence; and
- > ephemeral evidence – where this is the only evidence for an element (for example, of planning), should be cross checked by professional discussion and backed up by brief written evidence – for example in the form of annotations, storyboards or ‘witness statement’ (see below).

e-skills UK actively encourages the use of electronic portfolio management tools.

A.5 Witness statements

A ‘witness’ is someone who provides a written statement about the quality and authenticity of a candidate’s work for assessment purposes. To make a statement the witness must have first hand experience of the candidate’s performance and understanding of knowledge, skills and understanding required to do the work. Witnesses can be drawn from a wide range of people who can attest to performance, including line managers and experienced colleagues from inside the candidate’s organisation.

A witness statement may be needed when the candidate is performing day-to-day activities, which leave little or no evidence behind, for example, agreeing the outcomes to be produced using IT and any deadlines that need to be met or understanding and meeting organisational guidelines for data security and file storage. The witness can, in particular, provide evidence relating to the candidate’s competence:

- > when reviewing, testing and recommending ways of improving productivity using IT towards [IPU] the mandatory unit for ITQ Certificates and Diplomas;
- > when using specialist or bespoke IT software applications;
- > in meeting customer requirements; and
- > of working within organisational guidelines.

Annex B Summary of key changes to the ITQ

	Current position	Proposed approach
Type	NQF accredited NVQ	QCF accredited qualification
Titles	Level 1 NVQ for IT Users (ITQ) Level 2 NVQ for IT Users (ITQ) Level 3 NVQ for IT Users (ITQ)	Level 1 ITQ Award in IT User Skills Level 1 ITQ Certificate in IT User Skills Level 1 ITQ Diploma in IT User Skills Level 2 ITQ Award in IT User Skills Level 2 ITQ Certificate in IT User Skills Level 2 ITQ Diploma in IT User Skills Level 3 ITQ Award in IT User Skills Level 3 ITQ Certificate in IT User Skills Level 3 ITQ Diploma in IT User Skills
Unit template	Consists of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Statements of competence • Knowledge criteria • Knowledge components • Skills criteria • Skills component Key skills in IT related but not integrated	Consists of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning outcomes • Assessment criteria Skills and knowledge components are indicative and will not form the basis of assessment (unless defined through a syllabus or test specification) Functional skills ICT integrated into 3 new units
Rules of combination	Defined in terms of points totals	Defined for each level in terms of QCF unit credit values Spiky profile extended to include Entry level units
Accreditation of prior achievement	Exemption for recognised contributing units and qualifications	No change
Assessment strategy	Assessment must follow NVQ Code of Practice ¹¹ Assessment must be based on purposeful activities Assessors must hold a “D” or “A” award	Assessment must adhere to the <i>Regulatory Arrangements for the QCF</i> ¹² Assessment for mandatory unit must demonstrate purposeful application of skills and knowledge Assessors must be appropriately trained

¹¹ The NVQ Code of Practice covers: administrative resources; equality of opportunity; expertise of external verifiers; centre registration and approval; and data requirements; issue of certificates; enquiries and appeals; customer service, monitoring and evaluation; use of languages / assessment; application of assessment methodology (including the role and qualifications for assessors, internal and external verifiers; sampling and external reporting); and dealing with malpractice

¹² The Regulatory Arrangements for the QCF covers: Delivery of assessment – roles and responsibilities, procedures and systems, access, special consideration, personal interest, standardisation and quality assurance; Centre recognition; Award of credits; Award of qualifications; Ongoing review; Fees; Data requirements; Awards outside England, Wales and Northern Ireland; Use of languages; Appeals; Dealing with malpractice; Customer service; and Submitting qualifications for accreditation

Abbreviations used in this document

AB	Awarding Body
AoC	Area of Competence
APA	Accreditation of Prior Achievement
APL	Accreditation of Prior Learning
CCEA	Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (Northern Ireland)
CQFW	Credit and Qualification Framework for Wales
DCELLS	Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills (Wales)
FLT	Foundation Learning Tier
FS	Functional Skills
FS ICT	Functional Skills ICT
IPU	Improving Productivity using IT (mandatory unit in ITQ Certificate and Diploma programmes)
NICATS	Northern Ireland Credit Accumulation and Transfer System
NOS	National Occupational Standards
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
NVQ	National Vocational Qualification
PLTS	Personal Learning and Thinking Skills
QCA	Qualifications and Curriculum Authority
QCF	Qualifications and Credit Framework
SCQF	Scottish Credit and Qualification Framework
SQA	Scottish Qualifications Authority
SQLS	Sector Qualifications and Learning Strategy
SSA	Sector Skills Agreement
SVQ	Scottish Vocational Qualification
ULN	Unique Learner Number
VQ	Vocational Qualification
VRQ	Vocationally Related Qualification