

WORKING GROUP ON CREDIT ACCUMULATION AND TRANSFER IN THE NSQF

STARTER PAPER

CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE WORKING GROUP

It is intended that the NSQF will, in due course, encompass many different kinds of qualification. For example there may be qualifications which are mainly concerned with knowledge and qualifications which are mainly concerned with skills; qualifications designed to be delivered in a formal setting, where learning is timetabled according to a standard number of hours, weeks and terms/semesters, and qualifications designed to recognise on-the-job learning over whatever time is available and needed by the learner.

Qualifications in the framework will be classified in two main ways: by level and by size. The Framework already defines levels using level descriptors and gives guidance on how to determine the level of a qualification and its components in the Qualification File Guidance.¹ What is now required is to agree a means of describing the size of a qualification and its components. At present the Qualification File Guidance simply asks for this to be registered as “estimated learning hours” and notes that at some time in the future, this will become a credit system.

A credit system needs to be based on agreement about certain principles. The following are proposed as a starting point for the work of the Working Group on Credit Accumulation and Transfer in the NSQF.

NSQF credits points are:

- awarded for the achievement of learning outcomes which are subject to quality assured assessment
- based on notional learning time – the credit unit is 1 credit per (number to be agreed) notional hours of learning
- awarded at a level – eg “10 credit points at NSQF level 5”
- not awarded for attendance or experience
- not linked to grading for NSQF purposes

The basis for measuring credit given in the NSQF Notification and adopted by MHRD in 2014 is the use of notional hours of learning. These notional hours are a **proxy** for the volume or weight of learning required to achieve the **outcomes/competences** of a qualification or a component of a qualification. They are a form of currency and do not necessarily represent actual hours spent – just as the material value of a 1 Rupee coin is not likely to be 1 Rupee.

In the NSQF Notification, learning activities which can count towards total notional learning time include:

- formal learning, including classes, training sessions, coaching, seminars and tutorials
- practice and learning on the job - gaining, applying and refining skills in the workplace
- doing practical work in laboratories or other locations
- expected private study, revision and remedial work
- work-based activities which lead to assessment
- undertaking all forms of assessment

¹ Note that this is under review.

Organisations operating credit systems need guidance on how to calculate national learning time.² Should the time scheduled for classroom learning or workshop learning or learning on the job be converted into notional learning hours by a weighting, for example, to reflect the amount of actual learning likely to take place in these different settings? And if so, which context offers the most intense learning experience relative to the required outcomes – listening to a lecture, carrying out a task in a workshop or laboratory, or learning as part of a job? If there are weightings are they expressed as regulations or guidance? Are they the same for all kinds of outcome? And should they be the same at every level of the NSQF?

Whether the outcome is a regulation or guidance, it will have to take account of the different forms of qualification and learning in the Framework. It may be different in some respects for qualifications designed for delivery in the formal sector and those designed for the informal sector, mainly because the way that outcomes in these sectors are conceived and specified are likely to be different.

Another important feature of the credit system is the value of 1 credit. Many National Qualification Frameworks and Regional Frameworks around the world based the single credit on 10 notional hours of learning, but some use larger numbers. This is linked to the question of whether credits can only be awarded in whole numbers. Again the decision must take account of the needs of different kinds of qualification, and neither the formal, nor the non-formal sector can claim to offer the defining model.

² The time specified is “notional” because it is a guide and not a requirement for the delivery of a qualification. If an awarding body states that a qualification normally takes 240 hours to complete that does not mean that learners must prove that they have spent 240 hours learning. To be awarded the credit points, they must prove that they have achieved the learning outcomes of the qualification, but they may have taken 200 hours or 280 hours or have undergone an RPL/assessment-on-demand process.

REMIT FOR THE WORKING GROUP.

The working group is asked to investigate the following, report their findings and make recommendations relating to the establishment of a national credit system:

1. Factors to be taken account of in calculating notional learning hours for a qualification
2. The most suitable number of notional learning hours which equate to 1 credit point
3. Issues to be addressed in reaching agreements on credit transfer

The group should work with qualifications in a small number of sectors where work has already been undertaken to link the requirements of different sectors – eg MES Certificates, QPs and competence-based curricula.

1. *Factors to be taken account of in calculating notional learning hours for a qualification*

The group should

- (a) gather evidence from selected stakeholders about the methods which may be used to determine the size of a qualification and the factors which influence this process. This should address the question whether the approach should be different for different kinds of qualification and/or at different levels of the framework.

These factors would include typical knowledge and skills on entry to learning, the nature of the outcomes to be achieved, and the kinds of learning/instruction and assessment required. At a more detailed levels, time spent on each of the following would need to be taken into account: absorbing explanations and instructions by teachers/trainers; practice, repetition, reinforcement and advancement of skills; on-the-job learning; group activities; personal study; reflection and recording experience; preparing for and undertaking assessment tasks.

- (b) consider whether weightings are required to turn these into notional learning hours and investigate the application of such weightings to different kinds and levels of qualification. They should make a recommendation on weightings and whether such weightings should be the same for all kinds of qualification.

2. *The most suitable number of notional learning hours which equate to 1 credit point*

Again, working with different kinds of qualifications in a small number of sectors, the group should investigate the use of different credit point values to find out which value will be most widely useful. It is recommended that the group starts with the value of 1 credit = 10 Notional Learning Hours and then investigates the advantages and disadvantages of a series of higher values.

3. *Issues to be addressed in reaching agreements on credit transfer*

The group should carry out a detailed comparison of sets of related qualifications – eg a competence-based curriculum and the QPs it relates to – and report on the similarities and differences between them. They should note and record significant difference in outcomes and identify issues which arise in making the comparisons which relate to the awarding of credit and the potential for credit transfer in both directions.