Unit Delivery Research Project 2012-13

Report to the Skills Funding Agency

April 2013

Working for more and different adult learners

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Final Report to the Skills Funding Agency   March 2013

Contents

Executive Summary

1. The purpose of this report is to present to the Skills Funding Agency (the Agency) and its partners the outcomes of the Unit Delivery Research Project 2012-13

2. The report is the latest in a sequence of similar reports since 2010 that have monitored and reported on the gradual extension of unit delivery within the Agency's funding arrangements for the QCF. The Agency now supports unit delivery through the Offer for the Unemployed, through OLASS funding and, more recently, through the new QCF English and Maths qualifications for adults. The report also anticipates the introduction of the new Streamlined Funding System for Adult Skills in 2013-14.

3. The report needs to be read in the wider context of continuing reforms across the Further Education Sector. The Richard Review will lead to significant changes in both the structure and funding of Apprenticeships from 2014-15. The recently announced Whitehead Review of Adult Vocational Qualifications, together with the recent *Rigour and Responsiveness* paper from BIS will all have an impact on the future development of unit delivery within the QCF. Notwithstanding these wider changes, the BIS *Skills Funding Statement* 2012-15 reiterates the government's continuing commitment to the development of the QCF.

4. In this context, the Agency agreed to the establishing of a number of Unit Delivery Research (UDR) sites, or 'pathfinders' in 2012-13. The primary purpose of establishing Pathfinder providers in 2012-13 was to enable this small group of providers to use more flexible arrangements for unit delivery than those available to other providers. The intention was to anticipate the proposed shift to Streamlined Funding for Adult Skills in 2013-14 and to use the Pathfinders to test out key elements of the new funding system and to identify potential benefits and disadvantages of a unit-based approach to delivery in meeting learner and employer needs.

5. A total of 12 such UDR sites were identified, to include a variety of different types of provider in different English Regions. Each research site was given the freedom to offer units to learners outside the constraints of the Offer for the Unemployed or OLASS funding. The primary focus of the work of the UDR sites was provision for local employers, and the project aimed to identify successful local strategies for engaging employers in supporting training through a unit-based offer.

6. Given the small number of providers involved, and the relatively modest unit-based provision that was able to be promoted, designed and delivered during the scope of the project, the research report is based primarily on evidence from successful (and not so successful) work by the 12 UDR providers. No statistical significance should be attached to the outcomes of the research, and no data on leaner enrolments or achievements is included in this report. Indeed, much of the provision that informs this report is continuing through the remainder of 2012-13.

7. The NIACE project team visited all pathfinder providers and interviewed key staff in each site about their plans for unit delivery within the scope of the UDR project. Further interviews were conducted later in the project, either with staff involved in unit delivery or with learners. An event for pathfinders was held in London on February and sites were asked to produce final updates for the NIACE team prior to the publication of this report. Work on these unit-based programmes continues until the end of the academic year.

8. Three basic models of unit delivery were identified through the project, and the benefits of each one to learners and employers were noted. These three models were

   - An offer of stand-alone units leading to the award of credit
   - Units offered as explicit progression towards a qualification
   - Units offered as an addition to a qualification

9. The main body of the report includes examples from each of these models. It should be noted that, even within these three models there was considerable variety of approaches between different providers. However, some benefits of each model were able to be identified:

   - A stand-alone offer of units was easy to plan and organise and providers could implement these plans quickly. Most AOs were able to support such a model and it offers the widest possible range of progression opportunities to learners

   - An offer of explicit progression towards a qualification means that learners have the opportunity to demonstrate success before committing to a whole qualification. Employers also have the opportunity to witness learner success and providers can offer a clear next-step to learners, linking explicitly to improved qualification success rates

- Adding a unit or units to a qualification means that up-to-date employer needs can be addressed and the currency of learners' achievement is maintained. Particular specialist skills and knowledge can be delivered while providing useful messages to AOs about the need to update qualifications

10. The report identifies a range of issues related to unit delivery that are drawn from all the different examples used by UDR sites. These are summarised here:

- Distinctions between offering stand-alone units or offering units as progression to a qualification are largely meaningless in practice, as learner intent is often modified through the process of learning and achieving credit(s).
- Where learners are engaged through a unit they may well choose to progress to a qualification following the award of credit(s)
- The offer of a unit or units, rather than a whole qualification, enables providers to reach new and different kinds of learners, as well as new and different kinds of employer
- As unit-based provision can be tailored to employer needs they are more likely to contribute to the funding of such provision
- Once employees demonstrate commitment and motivation through the award of credits on individual units, employers are more willing to contribute to the funding of further training
- Co-funding can be developed through public funding of an initial unit or units, followed by employer funding of further units, rather than jointly funding each individual unit
- Employers appear to be willing to contribute to the costs of 'topping up' existing qualifications with new specialist units
- In some instances the UDR arrangements have been used to widen access to an existing unit-based programme developed through the Offer for the Unemployed
- The availability of QCF English and Maths units to adult learners is an important impetus to developing unit-based programmes

11. The report also identifies a wider range of issues that have been identified by providers as potential barriers to the wider development of a unit-based offer. Many of these issues have been raised in previous reports in this series, but there is clearly a continuing need to address them if concerns about rigour and responsibility are to be addressed as the QCF develops. These issues are summarised here:

- AO systems and procedures are not always responsive to provider needs. Some AO practices have changed in recent years, but there are still disincentives to developing a unit-based offer in the arrangements of some AOs for registration and certification
- A closely related issue is the costs and charges that continue to be made by some AOs that do not take account of unit-based provision.
- The use of the Personal Learning Record remains patchy, though it should be noted that significant improvements in the take-up of the PLR by AOs are under way and this should have a positive future effect on responsiveness within the QCF
- The impact of regulation on unit delivery was noted by some providers. In particular, there is continuing concern about the quality of some units offered by some AOs within the QCF
- The impact of streamlined funding was considered by pathfinders, though the recent announcement by the Agency of funding for small Awards through credit values came too late to be considered at interviews. Some providers are wary of the potential impact of the new Funding Rates Matrix on unit-based provision (though again the recent changes may allay some of these fears)
- The pathfinders had some interesting contributions to make about issues of co-funding, employer engagement and 'deadweight'. Again, there are a number of positive examples from pathfinders about using unit delivery to engage employers in further training
- The introduction of 24+ loans was seen as an issue of concern by a number of providers. In particular, the viability of a unit-based offer at Level 3 was seen as threatened by the introduction of such loans

12. Finally the report identifies some longer-term issues that it suggests the Agency needs to consider if it is to continue to support and extend the scope of unit-based provision in the future. These longer-term issues include:

- The long-term funding of unit-based provision, and whether it is cost-effective to continue to expand the scope of eligibility for unit-based provision, or whether providers should be permitted to choose an appropriate curriculum offer for learners, based on local needs, that may include units and/or qualifications
- The development of performance measures to support unit delivery that create a genuine incentive for providers to develop unit-based provision alongside their qualification-based offer
- The re-defining of learner entitlement within these new funding arrangements and performance measures to take account of the fact that an individual learner may be offered either units or qualifications or a combination of both.

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Recommendations

The report concludes with the following recommendations

Recommendation One

We recommend that monitoring of the work of current research sites should continue from April to July 2013 and that an updated report to the Agency in July 2013 should be produced, based on further feedback from these sites.

Recommendation Two

We recommend that a further small group of pathfinder providers should be identified for 2013-14, based on the current research sites plus up to six other providers. The remit of these pathfinder sites should be based on the current Unit Delivery Research sites, with a particular focus on employer-based provision. All pathfinders should be identified in time to begin delivery of unit-based programmes in September 2013.

Recommendation Three

We recommend that a group of six pathfinder providers should be identified for 2013-14 with a remit to offer QCF units in English and Maths alongside units drawn from other qualifications, based on a similar remit to other pathfinders. The Agency should commission a report on this provision.

Recommendation Four

We recommend that the Unit Offer for the Unemployed should be formally extended in 2013-14 to include employees declared to be at risk of redundancy and identified to providers through JCP.

Recommendation Five

We therefore recommend that the Agency should monitor the potential impact of the Funding Rates Matrix on unit-based provision during 2013-14 and should report to the Agency in 2014 on the outcomes of this monitoring

Recommendation Six

We recommend that the Agency should continue to support unit delivery at Level 3 for all learners through the pathfinder sites and should monitor the potential impact of 24+ loans on this provision.

Recommendation Seven

We recommend that a shadow credit success rate measure should be introduced in 2013-14 to run alongside the qualification success rate. This rate should be monitored and reported on by all providers engaged in unit-based provision, as well as by pathfinder providers.

Recommendation Eight

We recommend that the Agency should initiate a project together with Construction Skills during 2013-14 that explicitly aims to extend the

model illustrated in the current research project more widely throughout the construction industry.

Recommendation Nine

We recommend that a new definition of learner entitlement is established for 2014-15 within the context of the new Funding Rates Matrix, based on the overall credit value of a learner's planned achievements at a particular level, rather than on a qualification. The implications of such a definition of entitlement should be monitored through the pathfinder sites during 2013-14 to ensure it supports unit-based provision.

Recommendation Ten

We therefore recommend that, from 2014-15 onwards, the availability of unit-based provision within the QCF should be extended to all eligible learners, and that mature providers should be free to determine an offer of units and/or qualifications to eligible learners, based on an assessment of their needs

Recommendation Eleven

We recommend that in 2014-15 only providers identified as 'good' or 'outstanding' by Ofsted should be free to utilise this approach to unit funding. The impact of this approach should be monitored during 2014-15 and should then be extended to all providers from 2015-16, based on an assumed positive set of outcomes from this monitoring.

Recommendation Twelve

We recommend that Ofqual should commission in 2013-14 a comparison of AO systems and procedures, including fees and charging arrangements in three curriculum areas where qualifications are shared or similar across a number of AOs. The Agency should support Ofqual in this work and should invite comments on its outcomes from providers.

Purpose

1. The purpose of this report is to present to the Skills Funding Agency (the Agency) and its partners the outcomes of the Unit Delivery Research Project 2012-13[1]. Although this is a final and comprehensive report on the work of the project to date, a further update to the report will be produced in July 2013 towards the end of the academic year.

Background

2. Over the past three years the Agency has funded research and development aimed at supporting a unit-based curriculum based on the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) for learners undertaking Agency-funded provision. The Agency has also undertaken work to better understand the benefits and challenges of unit delivery. Several reports have been produced on these initiatives, and unit-based provision has grown across the Further Education (FE) sector as the outcomes of these different initiatives have informed Agency funding arrangements.

3. This report therefore needs to be considered as the latest in a series presented to the Agency in a context where the Agency itself has gradually extended funding arrangements that permit learners to access individual units or groups of units, rather than whole qualifications, as the funded aim of a programme of learning.

4. In June 2011 Ekosgen produced report on their *Evaluation of Flexible Delivery – Unit Funding Trials*. The following year, NIACE produced a follow-up report on *Unit Delivery and Credit Accumulation and Transfer within the QCF* that made recommendations to the Agency based on the 2011-12 Unit Delivery Trials. In December 2012, BIS produced a report on *Unit Delivery Trials: Assessment of Learner Benefits*. This report should be read explicitly in the context of these predecessors.

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[1] In the initial proposal to establish the project the prospective research sites were termed 'pathfinder providers'. Although the term Unit Delivery Research Site is used to refer to the providers involved in the project, on occasions the term 'pathfinder' is used in the text of the report.

5. In April 2011 the Agency announced the establishing of the Offer for the Unemployed for the 2011-12 funding year and confirmed that units would be funded as part of this offer. Although the initial definition of 'unemployed' was restricted to those actively seeking work, a broader definition was established during 2011-12 and informs Agency funding arrangements for 2012-13. There is now an acceptance within the standard funding arrangements that unit-based provision is particularly appropriate for this group of learners.

6. Similarly, unit-based provision also forms part of the offer for learners in the Secure Estate. The facility for offenders to access individual units is now also an accepted feature of OLASS funding arrangements, again arising in part from a demonstration of the particular advantages of this form of provision through Agency-funded research and development activity.

7. More recently BIS has confirmed that the new QCF English and Mathematics qualifications for adult learners will also be funded on a unit-by-unit basis. This is a wide-ranging offer, open to any eligible adult learner undertaking an Agency-funded programme.

8. The Unit Delivery Research project of 2012-13 needs to be seen in this context. Although a number of different groups of learners are able to access Agency funding on unit-based provision, this is not yet a universal offer to all Agency-funded learners. Although the Agency is committed to maintaining the offer of a unit-based curriculum for these existing groups, it is also keen to know if other groups of learners, for whom current funding arrangements are based on whole qualifications, might also benefit from unit-based provision. It is also keen to understand what structural issues remain with regard to unit delivery, and how units can support an increase in employer contributions to training.

9. This sets the context for the 2012-13 UDR project. The Agency is committed to ensuring that all learners on Agency-funded provision are offered a meaningful and challenging programme of learning appropriate to their individual needs. The BIS *Skills Funding Statement 2012-15* makes reference to BIS's intention to consider a further extension of unit funding in 2014-15. More recently the BIS paper on *Rigour and Responsiveness* reiterates the Department's interest in pursuing a unit-based approach. The current phase of research on unit delivery aims to provide information to the Agency about the potential benefits of extending unit-based provision to other learners who may benefit from this approach within the Agency's overall commitment to rigour and responsiveness in the provision that it funds.

Context

10. The QCF was formally established in November 2008 after several years of development, consultation, testing and trialling. The transition from the previous National Qualifications Framework (NQF) was completed for all vocational qualifications in March 2011. The transition towards an Agency funding model based on the QCF began in 2010. The Agency is committed to using the QCF as one of its key mechanisms for determining eligibility for funding vocational learning provision.

11. More recently, in their *Skills Funding Statement 2012-2015*, the Department for Business Innovation and Skills (BIS) has re-affirmed its commitment to the QCF as the framework for Post-19 qualifications. The *Skills Funding Statement 2012-15,* (2012) sets out the aims of BIS in taking forward the QCF but of reviewing it to make sure it functions more effectively in the future. The SFS also makes explicit its commitment to explore further the potential benefits of unit-based provision leading to QCF credits. Clearly the current work on UDR will be important in informing this BIS objective, and will contribute positively to the *Rigour and Responsiveness* agenda.

12. Notwithstanding the progress made in developing and implementing the QCF in recent years, both BIS and the Agency recognise that there are still potential inhibitors to the effective functioning of the QCF in relation to its objectives, and that improvements in the qualifications system supported by the QCF could be made. The current Whitehead Review of adult vocational qualifications, driven by both BIS and UKCES, together with the ongoing work of the Agency will, it is hoped, further improve the functioning of the qualifications system. BIS remains committed to a qualification system which is high quality and robust, and which also has the capacity to respond flexibly to changing needs. The QCF clearly supports this objective.

13. Of course the Agency itself has contributed to this aim of improving the functioning of the QCF, and the extension of unit delivery to a wider group of learners can be seen as part of this process. More broadly the Agency has also moved to align its funding arrangements more closely with the QCF and the shift to the new Streamlined Funding System for Adult Skills in 2013-14 marks a significant step forward in this contribution. More recently the Agency has also supported the wider use of the Personal learning Record (PLR) within the QCF, which is seen as a key precursor to the effective functioning of the QCF credit system in the longer term.

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Aims of the research

14. The primary purpose of establishing Pathfinder providers in 2012-13 was to enable this small group of providers to use more flexible arrangements for unit delivery than those available to other providers. The intention was to anticipate the proposed shift to Streamlined Funding for Adult Skills in 2013-14 and to use the Pathfinders to test out key elements of the new funding system and to identify potential benefits and disadvantages in a full implementation of the Streamlined Funding System for 2013-14

The research sites

15. It was decided to identify 12 research sites or 'pathfinders' for the 2012-13 Unit Delivery Research (UDR) project. This is fewer than the 18 providers, eight AOs and eight other organisations that took part in the 2011-12 work on *Unit Delivery and Credit accumulation and Transfer* but it should be emphasised that the remit of the 2012-13 project was narrower in one key respect. In 2011-12 providers were asked to monitor and report on the *Unit Offer for the Unemployed.* As this Offer is now clearly established as a standard part of Agency funding arrangements it was seen as unnecessary to collect and report on such provision in the current UDR project.

16. The 12 research sites were therefore invited to focus on the development of unit-based provision outside both the Offer for the Unemployed and OLASS funding. The research activity was also intended to provide more detailed information from providers than the 2011-12 project. NIACE was asked to work more closely with identified providers, monitoring and reporting on both their plans for introducing unit-based provision, and the issues raised in delivering such programmes to learners.

17. Initially it was proposed that these 12 providers be designated as 'pathfinders' during 2012-13. The concept of a pathfinder was based on an assumption that the Agency would confirm towards the end of 2011-12 the arrangements for implementing the new streamlined funding arrangements for 2013-14. This would give all providers over a year to prepare for these changes, and to operate the proposed 'shadow' funding arrangements. Meanwhile the 12 pathfinders would operate the proposed new streamlined funding arrangements, including the facility to offer units to any eligible learner, and would report on the issues that arose from this pioneering work.

18. In the event, this more ambitious concept of a pathfinder provider failed to materialise, and the new streamlined funding arrangements were not confirmed until January 2013. The 12 UDR sites were given an extended remit to offer unit-based funding to groups of learners outside the eligibility criteria operated across the wider scope of Agency funded provision, but the initial concept of a pathfinder for the 2013-14 funding arrangements was lost. The term 'pathfinder' however remains in use within the UDR research sites, though the original concept of a path towards streamlined funding has been amended to include the development of new 'paths' for learners based on unit delivery.

19. The primary focus of the work of the UDR sites in 2012-13 was work undertaken in response to demand from employers. Most other unit-based provision offered through the UDR sites was funded through the Offer for the Unemployed. The sites were formally identified through an Expression of Interest (EoI) to the Agency, based on a criterion of involvement in previous unit delivery initiatives in 2010-11 or 2011-12. Most sites were identified by October 2012. The last sites were confirmed in November.

20. Given the late start to the project (the original pathfinder proposal anticipated the identification of providers in June 2012) and the often complex processes involved in planning and delivering provision in response to employer needs, it should be emphasised that the 12 UDR sites were not expected to engage significant numbers of learners in such provision. This report is not constructed around data returns or analysis of learner numbers on unit-based provision, but on the practical experiences of research sites in planning, designing and delivering a unit-based curriculum to learners otherwise ineligible for unit-based funding through the Agency.

21. The 12 sites were selected in part to provide a range of different types of provider and in part to ensure a geographical spread across English Regions. However, as the sites were mainly self-selecting through an EoI process, they do not provide a proportional balance of Agency-funded providers, either by type or region. The 12 providers, and the key contact for NIACE's work on the project in each one, are listed in Annex B to this report. Both NIACE and the Agency wish to place on record their thanks to each of these providers for their contribution to the project during 2012-13, and to the AOs that have also contributed to the project.

Methodology

22. Once the 12 research sites were identified a member of the NIACE team made contact with the site and arranged an initial visit to discuss plans for unit delivery during 2012-13. Although some of the sites were already planning unit-based provision through the Offer for the Unemployed, most of the participating providers began this process of planning once their status as a UDR site was confirmed in October or November 2012. Indeed a few sites deferred confirmation of their plans until after this initial visit with a member of the NIACE team. Initial visits were completed in December 2012.

23. Following completion of initial visits a bulletin was produced for all research sites that summarised plans for provision within the scope of the project and identified similarities between some of these plans. Providers were also put in touch with each other and several of them made contact with other research sites to share aspects of their planning. During this period both the NIACE team and Agency colleagues responded to queries from research sites about whether or not particular aspects of planned provision met with both the remit of the project and wider Agency eligibility criteria.

24. Most contact with research sites was through senior managers in the provider organisation. In most cases there was also an opportunity for the NIACE team to meet and talk with teaching staff involved in the delivery of a unit-based curriculum. In some instances the NIACE team also had the opportunity to meet learners and employer representatives, though the time lag between approval as a research site and delivery of a unit-based programme meant that it was not possible to meet learners in most instances.

25. Towards the end of the project an event was held in London for UDR research sites. Nine of the 12 sites were represented at this meeting, which provided a good opportunity for people to share ideas and practice from different provider perspectives. The event, at which both the Agency and BIS were represented, also provided the NIACE team with an opportunity to identify key themes emerging from the research and to relate these to the wider context described above. These themes are reflected in the body of this report.

Three basic models for a unit-based offer

26. Although each of the providers involved in the project developed their own approaches for delivering a unit-based offer to learners, it is useful for the

purposes of this report to consider these different approaches in three separate groups. Each group is referred to in this section as a model for unit delivery and the advantages and disadvantages of these different models, and their relevance and/or value to different groups of learners, are considered later in this report.

27. These three models are identified as follows:

   - Stand-alone unit or units leading to the award of credits
   - A unit or units offering progression to a qualification
   - A unit or units offered as an addition to a qualification

28. It should be emphasised here that, in planning and delivering a unit-based offer, these three models were closely integrated in practice. So, for example, a unit-based programme might be offered to some learners on a 'stand-alone' basis and to others as a progression opportunity towards a qualification. All learners were working towards credits; some learners would accumulate these credits with others to achieve a qualification. Similarly, some units were offered to some learners as an addition to their main qualification, and to others in the same group as an integral part of a qualification.

29. In most of the cases considered as part of the research project, the units that formed the basis of a programme in all three of the above models were taken from a single qualification. However, this was by no means true in all cases. Several unit-based offers were based on units drawn from more than one qualification, and in several of these cases the units were offered by different awarding organisations. If we place these different options in a matrix it is possible to identify nine potential variations in a unit-based offer. In fact providers delivered programmes within the project based on seven of these nine options.

30. The following table illustrates these potential options and the range of practice covered by the 12 UDR trial sites. Of course some of the larger sites offered more than one of the above models:

	Stand alone units leading to the award of credits	Units offering progression to a qualification	Units offering an addition to a qualification
Units drawn from	X	X	X

one qualification			
Units drawn from two or more qualifications	X	X	See note 31 below
Units offered by two or more AOs	X	X	See note 31 below

31. In each case where units were offered as an addition to a qualification, these additional units were drawn from a single qualification. However, in one case these additional units were drawn from a different qualification offered by a different AO to that responsible for the main qualification being offered. In this broader interpretation all nine possibilities represented in the matrix were covered within the project.

32. This report now goes on to consider individual examples from research sites for each of the three models identified above.

Model One: Stand alone units leading to the award of credits

33. A number of providers offered provision based either on a single unit or on a small cluster of units to address a particular need in their locality for which a whole qualification was not an appropriate option. In some cases this need was expressed by a particular employer. In other cases a provider identified a need in response to a more general demand in the local labour market. Other providers based their unit offer around the needs of learners in their local community.

34. The benefits of such a model are that unit delivery is

- Easy to plan and organise
- Quick to move from plan to provision
- Easily understood by employers and learners
- Capable of support by (most) AOs
- Leaves open the widest possible range of progression opportunities

35. It should be emphasised once again that although most providers offered learners the opportunity to enrol on a programme based on an individual unit or units, the choice about learning goal rested entirely with the learner. If some chose to gain credits and then progress on to a full qualification they would be supported in doing so. If others chose to leave after gaining their target credits, they too would be supported in this choice.

36. There was a high degree of consensus behind the rationale for offering a programme based on individual or a small number of units. Such offers were more accessible to learners, addressed immediate employer and/or learner needs, and represented an easier commitment for the learner than a whole qualification, improving engagement and widening access to learners for whom whole qualifications were not attractive or accessible. However, within this overall consensus, a number of different approaches were developed. Examples of these different approaches are offered below.

Example A

37. One provider has established a substantial programme of training with local employers, based on individual units from the Level 3 Business Improvement Techniques (BIT) qualification. Most of these employers are SMEs working in manufacturing supply chains – a strategically important group but one that has traditionally been difficult to draw into planned training programmes.

38. The provider had previously tried to promote the full BIT qualification to employers without success. The whole qualification presented a significant challenge to employers in both paying for training and in releasing staff from production jobs to attend this training. In addition, some of the units in the qualification were seen as directly relevant to business improvement in small companies – others were seen as less useful. In summary, the whole BIT qualification failed to engage this group of employers.

> *Actually BIT is a good qualification. The problem is it's too big and some of the units are not seen as relevant to immediate business needs. There's not a single employer in our region that has taken up the whole qualification.*

Manager, Training Provider

39. The ability to offer individual units to employers changed this picture dramatically. In a short period of time six employers were engaged in training programmes offered by the provider, in each case offering two or three of the six units in the BIT qualification to their employees. This unit-based programme was more cost-effective for employers to co-fund and easier to organise around shift systems and production schedules. The units being delivered can be seen to have a direct impact on work-place practice and the credits awarded to learners reassure employers of the quality of the training.

40. One of the employers involved in this training is already discussing with the provider a follow-up programme to deliver the remaining units in the BIT qualification. Although unwilling to consider this previously, the improvements demonstrated as an outcome of the initial unit-based programme, plus the motivation of employees to continue adding credits to those already awarded, has convinced the employer that continued investment in training will bring measurable benefits to the company.

Example B

41. A local authority is co-funding a programme for local childminders based on an individual unit from a Level 3 Diploma in Child Care. The optional unit from the Diploma addresses directly the recently introduced Ofsted requirements for childminders working with children outside registered nurseries or pre-school provision. In order to remain in employment as a childminder, these Ofsted requirements have to met, and the award of credits for this individual unit effectively satisfies a 'licence to practice' requirement for this group of workers.

Actually I thought it [the single unit] was a qualification. When I get it I'll be qualified, right?

Joanne, Learner

42. The local authority accepts its 'duty of care' in ensuring that locally employed childminders are appropriately trained and qualified, while the childminders

themselves recognise the benefits of meeting Ofqual requirements in their work. The course is popular and well-attended and for most learners the achievement of credits for the individual unit is a clear learning goal. Although one or two learners expressed an interest in gaining the whole Diploma, the costs and time commitment involved in achieving a substantial qualification were a major barrier to progression.

> *I wouldn't have the time to do it [the Diploma]. This course is just about as much as I can manage with my work as well*
>
> *Caroline, Learner*

43. It should also be noted here that progression to employment and progression to a qualification are intimately linked in this area of work. The assessment for the Level 3 Diploma includes a substantial amount of observation of practice in a real work situation. Without the facility to work offered through achievement of the individual unit it would not be technically possible to complete the assessment requirements of the Diploma. In this context the unit offers both progression to employment and potential progression to a qualification as a single learning goal.

44. The provider itself recognises that the Level 3 Diploma in Childcare is not appropriate for this group, many of whom work part-time and are poorly paid. Many of the childminders in the current group are over 24 years of age and so a loan to undertake an individual unit would not be available to them in future. The local authority is happy to continue co-funding the offer of an individual unit, but unless such provision can be embedded into the standard offer made by the provider it seems such unit-based programmes will cease to be viable in the future.

Example C

45. A substantial unit-based programme is being offered by one provider to workers in the construction industry. The demand for labour on construction sites in many parts of the country is becoming more specialised, while the need to conform to legislative and health and safety requirements on

construction sites means that formal credentials in these specialist areas is becoming critically important to employability in the sector.

46. The response to this changing employment context in the sector from one provider has been to develop the offer of training and assessment in a number of specialist skills now being deployed in the sector and for which there is evidence of continuing demand from employers. So for example, construction workers with experience of operating particular tools or machinery on site; with experience of safe materials handling and storing; or of assessing, ordering and logging receipt of materials on site are all valued in the industry.

47. The provider has established a programme based around individual units from a range of Construction Skills qualifications and the assessment of practical skills in the work environment. Formal training is offered where needed to ensure that all the requirements of a unit can be met, but in a number of cases on-site assessment is sufficient to be able to demonstrate competence in a particular specialist skill, and credits can be awarded for that unit through an RPL process. More importantly the credits are becoming accepted as evidence of competence in that skill by employers, and the units on which credits have been achieved are recorded in the Construction Skills Certification Scheme – the 'card' required for employment on any construction site.

48. Once again a unit-based programme is engaging employers in training and assessment where the offer of a whole qualification would either be too costly for an employer to support or impractical to arrange on site. The offer of individual units to employees also fits with the sequencing of work on a construction site. At any one stage of the construction process different skills will be required on site and the ability to train to meet particular needs that are of immediate practical benefit is much more easily managed through a unit-based approach than the offer of a whole qualification.

> *The thing is that a modern construction site has lots of specialist jobs and these change over time as the building work progresses. The qualifications haven't kept up with these changes, which is why Construction Skills is willing to recognise credits from individual units to get a card*
>
> *Manager, Training provider*

49. Over time individual workers may accumulate sufficient credits from a number of job roles on different sites to achieve a whole qualification. However, a straightforward, linear path to such a qualification does not fit with the emerging patterns of recruitment and deployment of skills on many modern construction sites. Unit-based training is much more responsive to both employer needs and to the realities of workforce development in the construction industry.

Example D

50. Another provider offers a programme based on individual units in collaboration with employers in the Community Transport sector. In this case, rather than selecting one or two units from a qualification, the majority of the units in a qualification are offered, omitting those that form a significant barrier to employment opportunities for particular groups of learners.

51. The standard qualification in Community Transport includes units that are only accessible to those people able to drive. This may at first seem like a sensible and uncontroversial design feature for a qualification in Community Transport. However one provider has identified a demand from people who want to work in Community Transport but who are not able to drive. A unit-based programme allows these learners to develop the other skills required in Community Transport without requiring them also to drive a vehicle. Two local authorities recognise the importance of this particular programme and are co-funding it.

52. A unit-based programme, in this case explicitly omitting from the offer those units that form a barrier to some learners in achieving the whole qualification, therefore opens up employment opportunities in a particular area for people excluded from such opportunities by the requirements of the whole qualification. Less, in this instance, means more in relation to employment opportunities for people for whom involvement in their local community is important but who are not qualified to drive a community transport vehicle.

> *People aren't motivated by the pay for the work. What they want is to get out and about and to help people. They don't see it as a career or anything, they just want to keep involved with other people*

Curriculum manager, FE college

53. As with other examples in this model, recognition by an employer of the value of credits rather than a qualification is an important feature of the success of the programme. People completing the unit-based programme are recognised by the two sponsoring local authorities as employable in community transport. As many of the skills required are based on work with people rather than the operation of a vehicle, these people can be employed alongside drivers and make an important contribution to their local communities, even though the current Community Transport qualification is not an achievable goal for them.

Example E

54. Two providers based their stand-alone unit offer on units from the Level 2 IT Users Certificate. In both cases the offer of individual units enabled them to develop a flexible programme that focused on one or two units from the Certificate to meet immediate learner needs. One provider supported learners through a drop-in e-learning centre; the other offered a more formal taught programme.

55. One provider targeted employees from local companies while the second integrated their programme with provision through the Offer for the Unemployed, targeting people in the local community who did not meet the eligibility criteria for the Offer for the Unemployed. In both cases, the providers reported that people had progressed from the initial unit or units, either to a further unit-based offer within the IT Users Certificate, or to the whole qualification.

Most people come with a bit of experience of IT at home, or perhaps at work. It's important to start from somewhere they feel familiar, so a unit is ideal. Once they get credits for the first unit, most people are willing to go on and try something new

Course tutor, Local authority

56. Interestingly, although the providers offered units from the same qualification they registered learners with two different AOs. (The Level 2 IT Users

Certificate is offered by ten AOs). One reported that the AO had no arrangements for registering learners for an individual unit and charged the provider the same registration fee irrespective of the number of units taken by the learner. The second AO registered learners without question on individual units and charged for each unit proportionally.

Model Two: Units offering progression to a qualification

57. The second group of examples to consider in this report is based on units offered as an explicit precursor to a whole qualification. In some instances a unit may be taken from the qualification to which progression is offered. In other cases this unit may be offered alongside other units from a different qualification. In a third variation on this model the precursor units may be drawn from a different qualification to that which is offered as a progression opportunity.

58. The benefits of this model are that

- Learners have the opportunity to demonstrate success before committing to a whole qualification
- Employers also have the opportunity to witness learner success
- Providers can offer a clear next-step to learners, either within their institution or through local partnerships
- It links most explicitly to improved qualification success rates

59. Previous reports on unit-based provision, including that made through the Offer for the Unemployed, have identified this approach as significant in engaging new learners in provision and in motivating learners to progress to a qualification. What is interesting about the particular examples in the current project is that this approach can also engage employers in training and encourage them to offer opportunities for employees to achieve a qualification once credits for an initial unit or units have been achieved.

60. Once again it is necessary to emphasise that in many cases it was not possible to separate out provision under this heading from that in Model One above. Although learner intentions may vary, the organisation of the curriculum for those progressing to a qualification was often indistinguishable from provision based on stand-alone units.

Example F

61. One provider uses individual units as an explicit 'hook' (the term used in discussion with NIACE) to engage local employers in a wider training offer. This approach appears to work well in the Social Care sector, where employers are unwilling to commit significant resources to training and where many employees enter work with no or low level qualifications.

62. In one instance training in end-of-life care has been supported by Skills for Care as a strategic priority for the sector, so no Agency funding has been accessed for this initiative. An individual unit at Level 3 has formed the basis for training and over a hundred people have completed the unit successfully. The provider is now promoting the full Level 3 qualification to this group and several employers seem willing to fund progression to the full qualification now that employees have demonstrated that they are capable of achieving credits at Level 3.

63. Other units within the Level 3 qualification are also being offered using Agency funding. Again these are being offered in response to local demand for specific work-related skills in, for example, dementia awareness; understanding duty of care; and infection prevention and control. In effect these units are being offered as a 'loss leader' by the provider in order to demonstrate to employers both the benefits of training and the capability of their employees to sustain a commitment to training and to achieve credits.

There isn't a strong culture of training in the area, but employers recognise that training can help them in inspection and quality assurance checks. Getting them involved in a unit is sometimes a struggle, but once people get their first credits they often ask for more training and that begins a longer-term relationship with the employer

Senior manager, FE college

64. Where learners do achieve credits the demand for further training leading to a full qualification is significantly increased. Employers are able to develop a working relationship with the provider through the initial unit and an understanding (often as a welcome surprise) of the commitment and motivation of their employees to both training and improving workplace practice. The award of credits for completed units is significant in developing this mutual confidence and offering individual units has enabled the provider

to begin working with new employers in their area, who had previously shown no interest in offering a whole qualification. So a publicly-funded initial unit offer leads on to an employer-funded programme leading to the remainder of the credits required to achieve the full qualification.

Example G

65. Another provider offers a similar programme in a different region, this time linked explicitly to preparation for an Apprenticeship. Units at Levels 2 and 3 in, for example, safeguarding and protection; dementia awareness; and administering medication are offered to employees prior to progressing to an apprenticeship programme. The units not only give learners and employers an opportunity to experience part of the full apprenticeship programme, they are also used to assess the preparedness of people to progress directly to the Level 3 apprenticeship or to another Level 2 qualification.

66. All the units offered respond to particular demands from local employers for training to meet new requirements or standards in the care sector. For many employees, the achievement of credit on these units is sufficient to meet their immediate needs. For others, the experience of assessment leading to the award of credit proves quite stressful, and initial aims of registering for a Level 3 Diploma are amended to a less challenging qualification. However, some 25% of learners achieving credits on an individual unit do go on to a full Level 3 apprenticeship – a much higher figure than before in this particular sector.

> *The thing is that it [the unit-based programme] brings in an entirely different group of people than those who apply for an apprenticeship. Most of them are convinced that they couldn't do an apprenticeship, so every person that does progress is an addition to our normal intake. Not only that, they do really well on the apprenticeship because they've proved to themselves beforehand that they can do it.*
>
> *Manager, Training provider*

67. The unit-based programme in itself has led to improved Care Commission grades for employers as general staff skills in particular areas of work are improved and credits are formally recognised as measurable evidence of this improvement. Those staff progressing to a Diploma through a Level 3

apprenticeship programme are also contributing to the wider development of workforce skills in this still under-qualified workforce. The provider now intends to embed the offer of credits through individual units as part of the standard induction training programme it offers to employers throughout its region.

68. As this example shows, a unit-based programme can deliver immediate benefits to some employees through the award of credits to recognise particular skills, as well as a sound platform for progression to a more substantial qualification for those employees with more ambitious career-related goals in the care sector. Training is able to reach more individuals, and more employers are willing to support motivated individuals in progressing to an apprenticeship and a Level 3 Diploma.

Example H

69. Another provider is using the ability to offer individual units to extend the remit of its current unit-based provision to learners who are not eligible for funding through the Offer for the Unemployed. People with mental health problems, younger NEET learners and recent arrivals in the UK are all being offered similar programmes to unemployed learners, combining employability skills with introductory units from vocational qualifications, offered on a 'stand-alone' basis. The availability of QCF English and Maths units has also allowed this provider to extend the range of its unit-based offer, and to develop more substantial unit-based provision designed to prepare people for progression to a full qualification.

The new English units are a big plus for us, because we now have something around which we can organise something for second language speakers. They're not ideal, but at least it means we don't have to turn those people away

Senior manager, Local authority

70. The same provider is offering learners on non-accredited provision (ie provision that does not lead to certification) the opportunity to opt in to assessment on one or two units as a way of motivating them to progress to a qualification. QCF units are used as the basis for designing a curriculum offer, but some learners simply enrol on a programme without opting into

assessment, and their programme is supported through the Safeguarded Funding for adult learning. Where a learner chooses to opt in to assessment they can be funded either through the Offer for the Unemployed (if eligible) or through the UDR arrangements.

71. Such flexibility creates organisational and record-keeping problems for the provider. It also needs a responsive AO prepared to accept registration for a unit or units after enrolment on the programme. However, the provider reports an increasing proportion of learners opting into unit-based assessment, being awarded credits, and then progressing either to a more structured unit-based programme or to a full qualification. It seems that, once individual members of a group opt in to assessment and prove themselves capable of achieving credit, their confidence is shared with other members of the group who opt to follow suit.

> *Sometimes it just takes one person to opt in to assessment for a unit. Once they get their credits we present them at an awards event and next time everyone in the class wants to get credits*
>
> *Senior manager, Local authority*

72. This combination of different offers to learners is the most complex and the most flexible that the NIACE team encountered during the research project. However the provider is now experienced in constructing a unit-based offer and is committed to a genuinely responsive approach to individual learning goals. Embedding units within 'non-accredited' provision and basing assessment on individual choice rather than on the designation of a particular programme as 'qualification-bearing' is one of the more complex models of unit delivery, but is indicative of a maturity in provider use of the flexibility of the QCF that will hopefully encourage others to do likewise.

Example J

73. One further example is worthy of note here, though this remains as a planned programme of unit delivery – to date it has not been implemented, though the provider, working with their local JCP manager, still hopes to make this offer

later in the year. This is one proposed programme that NIACE suggests warrants further investigation before the end of 2012-13.

74. The proposed programme is based on the model already well-established by the provider through the Offer for the Unemployed. This combines employability skills with introductory vocational units and some diagnostic units in English and maths. The provider works in an area of high unemployment and proposes to offer a similar package to people in local companies whose jobs are identified as 'at risk of redundancy'. As the target group for such a programme would still be employed at the time it was delivered they would clearly not be eligible for funding through the Offer for the Unemployed.

People [at risk of redundancy] need exactly the same kind of programme that we offer to the Unemployed, but of course they're still employed so they're not eligible for funding. The irony is that they are much more focused and motivated at that point than they would be several months into unemployment.

Senior manager, FE college

75. It remains to be seen if this programme can be offered by this provider in 2012-13. However, the model itself would seem to be widely relevant. Now that so many providers utilise the Offer for the Unemployed to develop unit-based programmes, it would only need a change in the eligibility criteria for Agency funding, again working in partnership with JCP, to extend such an offer to groups of workers who are identified as 'at risk of redundancy' within their workplace. Indeed, a training intervention prior to being made redundant could be both more easily delivered and have a more significant impact on future employment chances than similar programmes offered to people once they become unemployed.

Model Three: Units offering an addition to a qualification

76. This model was used less frequently than either of the other two, but there was still some interesting variety in the approach of different providers. Several providers have plans to extend their offer based on this model in the spring of 2013, so there may be more examples to follow up in the future.

77. The benefits of this model are that

   - Up-to-date employer needs can be addressed
   - The currency of learners' achievement is maintained
   - Particular specialist skills and knowledge can be delivered
   - It provides useful messages to AOs about the need to update qualifications

   Example K

78. A simple model was used by a provider to enable learners to achieve more than one specialist pathway within a single qualification in Leadership and Management. Units were offered and credits achieved beyond the rules of combination for a single pathway within the qualification. This enabled learners to become qualified in more than one specialist area, and employers were happy to co-fund these additional units in order to create more flexibility within their workforce. Delivering these units as an integral part of an overall programme based on qualifications was also a cost-effective model for the provider.

It fits what's going on in the sector. Ten years ago you'd have had two specialists, each with their separate responsibilities. Now with the cuts you've got one person who's expected to be an expert in both areas. You've got fewer people but you've got more specialisms so everyone is going to have to be an expert in more than one area

Manager, FE college

Example L

79. In the above example the additional units were delivered alongside the main qualification as an integral part of a learner's programme. Another provider offered a similar programme, but in this instance the additional units were delivered as a follow-up programme, following completion of an initial qualification in Industrial Cleaning Techniques. Some of the employees who had completed the initial qualification were nominated by their employer to attend training based on additional specialist units in cleaning.

> *It's the kind of thing we've been doing for a long time. The difference is that we can now offer a unit and award credits to the people who get it. In the past we'd just have run the training for the employer without any accreditation and the employees would have got no recognition*
>
> *Manager, FE college*

80. Although the initial qualification had been co-funded, the additional units were charged at full cost to the employer. Not only were the units targeted at specialist cleaning materials and techniques of immediate relevance to the employer, but the employees released for training had already demonstrated their ability to achieve at this level, and the employer had confidence in their ability to achieve the additional credits in these specialist units. This would seem to be an important model for continuing professional development, though as the above example shows it also has an application to skills updating at all levels of achievement.

Example M

81. One provider offered a unit-based programme in Sports Science in which additional units were offered from another qualification offered by another AO. Although a complex and potentially costly model (registration and certification costs had to be paid to two AOs), the rationale for developing it was based on sound local labour market intelligence and the willingness of employers to co-fund the additional units.

82. The rationale for developing the model was that the accepted industry standard qualification in Sports Science did not include the particular specialist units in Performance Analysis that local employers wanted to offer to their staff. The provider had the technology and the expertise to deliver the specialist units, which had been developed by another AO, but also wanted learners to achieve the qualification with maximum currency in the particular sector. So the additional units in Performance Analysis were integrated into the overall Sports Science programme, but the credits for these units were awarded to learners by a second AO, and in addition to their main qualification.

> *All the local [football] clubs want Performance Analysis training. We've invested in the equipment and we've got the trained staff, but the main qualification for the industry doesn't include it. Being able to offer units from another qualification means we can meet their needs and make best use of our own resources*
>
> *Senior manager, FE college*

83. The interesting thing about this model is that in the short term it allows the provider to respond to local demand for particular skills by drawing on elements of two different qualifications – using all the units from one and two of the units from another. However, in the longer term the provider is also demonstrating to the so-called 'industry standard' qualification that it is not up-to-date in relation to employer demand. We might anticipate in such circumstances that the rules of combination of the main qualification might be reviewed in future to establish a Performance Analysis option within the qualification. Failure to respond in this way may soon lead to a change in perception of where the 'industry standard' lies.

84. It is also worth noting that the provider involved is Outstanding in Ofsted terms and has an excellent reputation for both the quality of its provision and its responsiveness to the needs of its community in an area of high unemployment and social deprivation. In such circumstances there are more than adequate guarantees in place that such a programme, though constructed from different qualifications offered by different AOs, is coherent, meaningful and challenging to learners.

Key issues identified by the research sites

85. One of the key objectives of the project was to allow research sites the freedom to develop unit-based provision in response to local needs, and then to evaluate the potential benefits and inhibitors to the delivery of unit-based programmes based on these needs. As the above examples illustrate, providers devised a range of different approaches to delivering these unit-based programmes. Notwithstanding these differences in approach it is possible to identify some common themes arising from the various research sites that can help to inform the future development of unit delivery within the QCF.

86. It should be remembered that one of the reasons for identifying 'pathfinder' providers was to end the continuing series of trials of unit delivery and move towards an integration of the lessons from previous trials into the mainstream of delivery within the QCF. In the event the research sites have effectively become a further extension of previous unit delivery trials. Once again it is necessary to consider how the lessons from the 2012-13 UDR sites can be embedded into the everyday operation of the QCF without going through yet one more year of 'trials'.

87. In this context the issues raised through the research sites need to be considered in the broader context of ongoing development of unit delivery within Agency funding arrangements. The 2012-13 UDR sites are adding a layer of detail both to previous Agency work in this area, and to the more recent BIS Report on *Unit Delivery Trials: Assessment of Learner Benefits* based on survey conducted in August 2012. This cumulative evidence leads to the identification of a number of key issues, each one illustrated through the current research activity, but each one also building on more substantial previous research and feedback.

88. With this wider context in mind, the following key issues from research sites have been identified:

- Distinctions between offering stand-alone units or offering units as progression to a qualification are largely meaningless in practice, as learner intent is often modified through the process of learning and achieving credit(s).
- Where learners are engaged through a unit they may well choose to progress to a qualification following the award of credit(s)

- The offer of a unit or units, rather than a whole qualification, enables providers to reach new and different kinds of learners, as well as new and different kinds of employer
- As unit-based provision can be tailored to employer needs they are more likely to contribute to the funding of such provision
- Once employees demonstrate commitment and motivation through the award of credits on individual units, employers are more willing to contribute to the funding of further training
- Co-funding can be developed through public funding of an initial unit or units, followed by employer funding of further units, rather than jointly funding each individual unit
- Employers appear to be willing to contribute to the costs of 'topping up' existing qualifications with new specialist units
- In some instances the UDR arrangements have been used to widen access to an existing unit-based programme developed through the Offer for the Unemployed
- The availability of QCF English and Maths units to adult learners is an important impetus to developing unit-based programmes

89. Each of these issues is considered in more detail below, and the implications for the future development of Agency or Departmental policy in relation to the broader qualifications system, including the QCF, are also considered.

90. **Distinctions between offering stand-alone units or offering units as progression to a qualification are largely meaningless in practice, as learner intent is often modified through the process of learning and achieving credit(s).**

As the examples from Model One and Model Two above illustrate, some learners accessing a unit-based programme will do so in order to gain credits for a unit or units and then continue with their existing work role. Others will use the units as a stepping stone towards a whole qualification. Providers themselves make little or no distinction between these different outcomes in organising a unit-based curriculum. Basing eligibility for funding on the intentions of learners to progress to a qualification is impractical, unnecessarily complicated, and a barrier to progression for some learners.

91. **Where learners are engaged through a unit they may well choose to progress to a qualification following the award of credit(s)**

Having noted this, many learners change their mind (or make up their mind) about progression to a qualification only after an initial award of credits motivates them to do so. In all cases new and different learners are able to progress to a qualification through a unit-based offer, even if some of them do not enter a unit-based programme with this intent. There are no examples in the current research of either providers or learners 'substituting' achievement of credits for achievement of a qualification. Many of those engaged in unit-based programmes have simply not been previously engaged through the offer of a qualification.

92. **The offer of a unit or units, rather than a whole qualification, enables providers to reach new and different kinds of learners, as well as new and different kinds of employer**

The ability of unit-based provision to attract new and different learners is well-documented and reported. The 2012-13 UDR sites add further evidence to support this. However the current research, focused as it is primarily on response to employer needs and demands, illustrates how unit-based provision can engage employers in training where previously no provision had been in place. Employers are more likely to commit to unit-based provision because it meets their immediate needs to improve skills. The research sites also demonstrate that unit-based provision can be effective in getting employers to commit to the training of staff in poorly paid work, or at lower levels of achievement. Enabling employers to focus on improving particular skill needs through individual units can help to spread the culture of training and development to new areas of the workforce.

93. **As unit-based provision can be tailored to employer needs they are more likely to contribute to the funding of such provision**

There is clear evidence from the current research sites that employers are more likely to pay for training based on individual units than they are to pay for a whole qualification. Clearly cost is an issue here, as well as time spent in training away from the shop floor. Unit-based programmes are clearly more accessible to SMEs, but cost and staff replacement costs are issues even for larger organisations. It seems that not only are employers more willing to co-fund unit-based provision, they are also more willing to fund the costs of

subsequent training in full once an initial unit-based programme has been completed.

94. **Once employees demonstrate commitment and motivation through the award of credits on individual units, employers are more willing to contribute to the funding of further training**

Just as learners enrolling on a unit-based programme may become motivated to progress to a qualification once an initial award of credit has been made, so it seems that some employers are more willing to support employees in progressing to a qualification once they have demonstrated the ability to achieve credits on an initial unit-based programme. This appears to be particularly the case in lower level skills, or in sectors with a previously poor record in training. In effect employers appear to use an initial unit-based offer to assess employees' ability to cope with formal assessment towards the award of credit, and therefore to justify the investment in their training. The award of credit on an initial unit-based programme not only motivates the learner to progress to further achievement (credits or a qualification) but it also appears to reassure an employer that further investment in training for that employee will have measurable returns in skills development and improvement. This investment may be co-funded or fully funded by the employer.

95. **Co-funding can be developed through public funding of an initial unit or units, followed by employer funding of further units, rather than jointly funding each individual unit**

The assumption behind the co-funding model is that both the Agency and an employer (or an individual) contribute to the cost of training throughout a programme. In practice of course the employer contribution is negotiated with the provider and may not meet the full 'assumed contribution' calculated by the Agency. The research sites illustrate that a more subtle concept of co-funding may engage employers more fully in such arrangements. An initial unit or units is offered by a provider without any assumed employer contribution (one provider refers to this a 'loss leader'). Once employees have demonstrated their ability to achieve credits on these units (as in the above section) the employer is then approached to contribute towards the remaining units to support progression to a full qualification. It seems that such a

commitment is not only easier to achieve once initial units have been successfully delivered, but that some employers may be willing to fully fund, rather than co-fund, these 'top-up' units. In any event a significant employer contribution to training is secured through initial engagement on a unit-based programme, often in areas where no such contribution had previously been forthcoming.

96. Employers appear to be willing to contribute to the costs of 'topping up' existing qualifications with new specialist units

Another area in which employers appear to be willing to contribute to employee training costs is through 'topping up' an existing qualification with new specialist units. This is important in areas where changing legislation or quality assurance requirements compel an employer to develop new skills in an already-qualified workforce. In this case the ability to demonstrate that employees have achieved credits for these specialist units reassures the employer that the required new skills have been embedded in workplace practice, as well as providing evidence of compliance with new statutory or regulatory requirements. In such cases employers may contribute through co-funding or full funding of such training. The research sites also provide evidence of employers' willingness to contribute to additional units where new skills are needed but no regulatory or quality assurance compliance requirements are in place. Once again it seems that the award of credit on these additional units is valued by the employer as evidence that their additional contribution to employee skills development is producing tangible returns on investment. In these circumstances employers will contribute to skills training, even for lower level skills in sectors with a poor training record.

97. In some instances the UDR arrangements have been used to widen access to an existing unit-based programme developed through the Offer for the Unemployed

In some instances providers have constructed an offer through their status as a UDR site that is designed to widen the scope of existing programmes developed through the Offer for the Unemployed. Providers have identified several groups of learners (for example younger NEET learners, recent arrivals in the UK, people recovering from mental illness, part-time workers on zero-hours contracts) who do not meet the eligibility requirements for

provision through the Offer. The needs of many of these learners, for help with employability skills, for improvement in presentational and job-search skills, or for introductory training in a new area of employment, are very similar to those targeted by the Offer for the Unemployed and programmes developed through the Offer can be offered or adapted to meet the needs of this group. In such cases the UDR sites are highlighting a restriction on the availability of unit-based provision that could be addressed through a review of the current eligibility criteria.

98. **The availability of QCF English and Maths units to adult learners is an important impetus to developing unit-based programmes**

It should be noted that 2012-13 is the first year in which the new QCF qualifications in English and Maths have become available to adult learners. Indeed, some of these qualifications have only become available during the current year as more AOs have been recognised by Ofqual to offer such qualifications. As the Agency has confirmed that any eligible adult learner may be offered individual units taken from these qualifications, a number of providers (including some research sites) are beginning to offer unit-based programmes based on English and Maths units. There is already evidence that such units are being offered together with units from other qualifications (eg in employability skills or personal development) to help people prepare either for employment or for progression to further learning. Embedding English or Maths units in these wider unit-based programmes appears to be growing rapidly as providers get to grips with the new qualifications. This is one area where the wide availability of the English and Maths units may begin to create tensions with the more restricted availability of other units. Offering English and Maths units alongside whole qualifications may prove popular, but the lack of restrictions on eligibility for these units throws into ever-sharper contrast the continuing restrictions on eligibility for other units that providers may wish to offer as part of an employability or work preparation package. It is suggested that these potential tensions need to be monitored, perhaps within the scope of further work on unit delivery in 2013-14.

Wider issues arising from the project

99. As noted above, the original intention of the 'pathfinder' providers proposed to the Agency in the NIACE 2011-12 report on *Unit Delivery and Credit Accumulation ad Transfer within the QCF* was to prepare the ground for the anticipated changes in Agency funding arrangements for 2013-14. Notwithstanding the introduction of the new Streamlined Funding System for Adult Skills, the changes to funding arrangements in relation to unit delivery remain largely unchanged in the 2013-14 Funding Rules. However, one recent change has been announced, which is the commitment to fund small Awards on a credit value basis. Units will be funded in a similar way and this marks an important step forward in the shift towards a more flexible funding system for adult skills.

100. These changes need to be seen in the wider context of reform and change in the FE sector. In the 2012-15 Skills Funding Statement the potential impact of the government's response to the Richard Review of Apprenticeships is noted, and proposed changes to some of the funding of existing Apprenticeship Frameworks initially proposed for 2013-14 are now proposed to be implemented in 2014-15. In effect, an additional year of review and reform is to be undertaken prior to implementation of any further changes in funding arrangements.

101. During this additional year, BIS will conduct a review of the operation of the QCF (presumably in collaboration with the proposed Ofqual review) to improve its effective functioning and will also consider 'whether to extend the unit offer' from 2014-15. (*Paragraph 23 of the Skills Funding Statement).* In effect the potential changes that might have been anticipated in extending the unit offer in 2013-14 might now be expected to be implemented from 2014-15. By this time the outcomes of the Whitehead Review will also be known and will no doubt inform the continued implementation of the *Rigour and Responsiveness* agenda.

102. In this context the longer term commitment in the Skills Funding Statement is important:

Freeing the FE system from central control is crucial to the Government's wider reform agenda which recognises the maturity of the sector to run its own business… The future relationship between the sector and Government will be built on freedom not control (Para 64)

103.	In considering how we might build on some of the lessons learned from both the current phase of research on unit delivery, as well as previous unit delivery trials, we therefore need to identify both immediate and ongoing changes that can continue to support unit delivery in 2013-14 as well as the wider context of funding reform from 2014-15 onwards. In doing so this report identifies potential issues that can continue to be addressed through the centrally controlled approach to unit delivery that will be extended into 2013-14, as well as the mature approach from 2014-15 based on the sector's freedom to run its own business.

Issues to be addressed in 2013-14

104.	The following issues are identified as barriers to both the existing use of units within the QCF and the further development of unit-based provision that can be addressed within current or planned policy and funding arrangements. Indeed some of these issues are ongoing and reflect the need for continuing progress in some areas of implementation of the QCF. These issues include:

- AO systems and procedures
- AO costs and charges
- The use of the Personal Learning Record
- The impact of regulation on unit delivery
- The impact of streamlined funding
- Co-funding, employer engagement and 'deadweight'
- The introduction of 24+ loans

105.	Each of these issues is considered below, focusing on its potential influence over the ability of providers to further develop unit-based offers either through English and Maths units, through the Offer for the Unemployed or OLASS, or through the current UDR 'pathfinder' arrangements.

**106.	AO systems and procedures**

There is evidence from the research sites that some AOs have still not developed flexible and responsive systems and procedures that encourage and support providers in developing a unit-based curriculum. Having said this, there is also evidence that some AOs have changed their practice in response to the potential flexibilities of the QCF, and others continue to do so. One provider in the project reports changing AOs in order to better support unit

delivery, particularly in relation to unit registration and the efficient award of credit. We may anticipate further progress in this area in 2013-14 as more AOs update systems and procedures to respond to provider demands for flexibility. This is one area where market pressures should produce continuing improvement.

107.   AO costs and charges

Closely linked to AO systems are costs and charges to providers. Again there is evidence of change in this area – one large AO is in the process of changing its charging structure to align with the new streamlined funding credit bands and others have already made this shift to a credit-based charging structure. The project has allowed research sites to compare experiences of AO charges and we may assume that this too will bring pressure to bear on AOs that continue to charge unduly large fees for registration and the award of credit for individual units. As with other AO systems and procedures, 2013-14 should bring further changes in AO charges as providers demand more flexibility in relation to unit-based provision.

108.   The use of the Personal Learning Record

Linked to the development of further AO responsiveness is the use of the PLR. Some provider representatives involved in the research project were unaware of the existence of the PLR. Others knew about it but made little or no use of it. Only one research site used the PLR systematically across its whole curriculum offer. In this context the recent progress made in securing AO buy-in to the PLR, and the clear incentives to use the PLR to record credit achievement within the new streamlined funding system should give a major impetus to the further use of the PLR by providers in 2013-14. It is suggested that this will also help to stimulate more responsive AO systems for recording the award of credit for learners on individual units – indeed it may help some AOs to move to a purely electronic system of recording credit achievement which should help to reduce costs and charges to providers. This is one area where 2013-14 should bring significant positive benefits to unit-based curriculum development.

109.   The impact of regulation on unit delivery

Although providers themselves made no reference to the impact of regulation on their ability to offer individual units to learners, there were some issues raised in relation to AO systems and procedures that could be influenced by more effective regulation of the QCF. So, for example, providers noted the differences in credit values of very similar units offered by different AOs. Others noted the plethora of different units available in a particular curriculum area (the new English and Maths qualifications were highlighted in this regard). The continuing barriers to transferring credits between different AOs was also noted as a clearly linked problem. Although these are all issues for providers in their dealings with an individual AO, it is suggested that some of these issues might be addressed through a more active focus of regulatory systems on units as well as qualifications. The QCF may be a unit-based framework, but the regulatory approach of Ofqual clearly remains predominantly qualification-based.

110.   The impact of streamlined funding

Providers were anticipating the introduction of the new streamlined funding system with different expectations. Some providers welcomed the shift to a system based on banded credit values rather than glh, as it would make it easier to fund work-based learning and e-learning more equitably. Other providers feared that the new funding bands would make the qualifications system more rigid and inflexible, eliminating many smaller qualifications that currently did not fall at the bottom of a funding band. The most interesting perspective in relation to unit delivery came from a provider who thought the new funding arrangements would do away with the need for units altogether. Hopefully the most recent announcement of funding for small Awards based on credit values will allay some of these fears. Providers remain concerned about some aspects of the Funding Rates Matrix and its potential impact on the QCF credit system. It is suggested this potential impact needs to be monitored closely during 2013-14.

111.   Co-funding, employer engagement and 'deadweight'

The feedback from most research sites sets the concept of 'deadweight' (ie the allocation of public funds to provision that an employer should or would have paid for anyway) in an interesting context. The principle that the offer of individual units can engage learners in provision who would otherwise not have taken up the offer of a full qualification now seems to be well proven by several recent research reports (including BIS's own research into learner benefits). What the feedback from the 2012-13 research sites seems to suggest is that the same principle might be applicable to employers. In other words, rather than replacing employer investment with public funding, the offer of a unit-based programme seems to draw smaller and less-well resourced employers into investment in training where none existed before. Co-funding units appears to engage new and different employers in funding training, just as it engages new and different learners. Far from being 'deadweight', the evidence from the current project suggests that 'seed corn' public investment in unit-based provision can draw in previously untapped employer investment in training by stimulating confidence and motivation in both employees and employers to progress to further training and achievements. It is suggested that this feedback from research sites needs to be further monitored and evaluated in 2013-14.

112.   The introduction of 24+ loans

The introduction of 24+loans was viewed with trepidation by some providers. At Level 3 there may be clear employment or career gains in achieving credits in a single unit that met new statutory or regulatory requirements (as Example B above illustrates). For older learners, the opportunity to secure a loan to support such provision was excluded by the requirement linking loans to full Certificates or Diplomas within the QCF. This created an unnecessary barrier to career progression – older learners might be willing to finance learning through a loan to achieve the credits needed to meet new requirements through a single unit, but may not be willing to do so for a whole Certificate or Diploma. Feedback from providers suggests that there is significant demand from learners for unit-based provision at Level 3. In this context it is suggested that the impact of loans on unit delivery is another area which needs to be monitored closely in 2013-14.

Longer term issues

113.   In addition to the above issues that will continue to have an impact on the development of unit-based offers during 2013-14, it is also possible to identify three longer-term issues that need to be addressed, either by the Agency or by BIS, if the potential benefits of unit-based delivery are to continue to be extended and embedded across the FE sector. These three issues are:

- The long-term funding of unit-based provision
- The development of performance measures to support unit delivery
- The re-defining of learner entitlement within these new funding arrangements and performance measures

Long-term funding of unit-based provision

114.   The development of funding for unit-based provision has proceeded in recent years on the basis of either identified demand from particular groups of learners, or the particular characteristics of a curriculum area. So, for example, learners with learning disabilities have always been able to access Agency funding to support programmes based on individual QCF units. Aspects of previous Foundation Learning provision were also able to be based on individual units. More recently the new QCF English and Maths units have been able to be delivered within Agency funding rules.

115.   The initial Unit Delivery Trials of 2010-11 established clear evidence of demand for unit-based provision among unemployed adults, and from 2011-12 this provision was built in to the funding rules through the Offer for the Unemployed. Offenders were also given access to unit-based provision through OLASS funding rules. During 2011-12 the scope of eligibility for the Offer for the Unemployed was widened and this wider scope was entrenched in the 2012-13 funding rules.

116.   At the same time the number of units available to learners was expanded from an initial list to a much bigger list to any unit that formed part of a recognised qualification. The use of the Innovation Code also helped to widen the scope of units able to be offered to eligible learners. The Agency and BIS are now faced with a choice to either extend further the scope of unit-

based provision in response to newly-identified needs on an incremental basis, or to review the current approach to funding unit delivery within the context of the BIS review of the QCF and the future commitment to freedom from control of a mature FE sector.

117.   As noted above it is clear that the wider context of reform precludes further radical changes to the proposed funding approaches to support unit delivery in 2013-14. However it is suggested that such changes could be introduced from 2014-15, again with some 'precursor' or 'shadowing' arrangements in place for 2013-14 to prepare the ground for these more radical changes. The recommendations that follow reflect this two-stage approach, proposing some further incremental changes in the funding of unit delivery in 2013-14, together with proposals for monitoring and reviewing these, together with some more radical changes from 2014-15.

118.   These longer term changes are based firmly on the principle of 'freedom not control in a mature sector'. In effect they suggest that no matter how far the eligibility criteria for the funding of unit delivery is widened through annual incremental changes, they will never be able to anticipate or support the full range of individual demands of either employers or learners. In such a context unit-based provision will always be seen by providers as a 'special' or 'marginal' activity, rather than part of mainstream Agency funding arrangements, and the full potential flexibilities of the QCF will never be realised in this context.

119.   Thus, although further incremental changes to unit funding are proposed for 2013-14, this report also recommends that from 2014-15 providers are permitted to offer either units or qualifications to any eligible learner, based on an assessment of need in response to the demands of employers or the wider labour market, either locally or nationally. The report also recommends ways in which this facility might be introduced over time in order to ensure that the principle of 'freedom with maturity' is reflected in future funding to support unit delivery.

Performance measures to support unit delivery

120.   Consideration of performance measure to support unit delivery have not formed a significant part of the current project, though providers have welcomed the opportunity to develop unit-based offers in the knowledge that they will not be adversely risking their performance assessment based on qualification success rates. However two of the more mature providers have noted that the revision of the current QSR to include credits achieved through

a unit or units would enable them to extend their current unit-based offer to other disadvantaged or hard-to-reach groups within their local community. The ability to count credit success alongside qualification success will enable providers to reach new and different learners through unit-based provision, some of whom may not progress (or not progress directly) to a qualification.

121.   The ability to count credit success alongside the achievement of an Award, Certificate or Diploma towards performance assessment measures is interesting in the context of employer engagement in unit-based provision outlined above. If providers are encouraged to promote unit-based provision to employers, knowing that credit success rates can contribute to performance scores, then they are more likely to promote such provision and employers are more likely to become engaged in training leading to the award of credit, and contribute towards its costs.

122.   It is suggested in the recommendations that follow that the introduction of a credit success rate measure needs to ensure that, not only does it not disadvantage providers basing provision on units rather than qualifications, but that it creates – at least in the first instance - a positive incentive for providers to develop unit-based programmes that can offer maximum flexibility and responsiveness to both learners and employers. Evidence from the 2012-13 research sites suggests that such an incentive could lead to increased progression to whole qualifications, as well as increased employer contributions to workforce training.

Redefining learner entitlement

123.   It is already becoming clear that the existing concept of learner entitlement based on the funding of programmes leading to whole qualifications is not going to be fit-for-purpose within the new streamlined funding arrangements. The introduction of credit-based funding bands creates the possibility of inequity in the concept of entitlement (ie some learners fulfilling their entitlement through a qualification very much smaller than another qualification offered to another learner) or a failure to utilise the potential flexibility of the funding matrix (ie a concentration of qualifications within that band designated as fulfilling a concept of 'entitlement').

124.   The further development of unit-based provision will also call into question existing measures of entitlement. In particular, we may anticipate a significant extension of provision utilising (either together with other units or alongside qualifications) the new QCF English and Maths units in 2013-14 (the first year in which they will be widely available). The introduction of a

credit success rate measure alongside existing qualification success rates will further call into question a definition of entitlement based on qualifications alone.

125.   This report therefore recommends that a new definition of entitlement is established within the new streamlined funding arrangements that defines learner entitlement in relation to the overall credit value of a learner's programme of study, that may be based on units and/or qualifications. Of course, other constraints on entitlement based on age or level of achievement could be retained, but the current definition of entitlement needs to be reviewed in the context of other changes prior to the announcement of the 2014-15 funding rules.

Monitoring and review of the streamlined funding arrangements

126.   These longer term proposals also assume that the streamlined funding matrix introduced in 2013-14 will continue to form the basis of future funding arrangements for adult skills. However, if the concerns of both providers and AOs about the consequences of the new funding matrix are realised, then it may well be that the matrix itself will need amendment from 2014-15. Shifting funding allocations from glh to credit values is a positive move forward, but the matrix may need a further shift from qualification bands to unit credit values if it is to support the intended benefits and flexibilities of unit-based delivery.

127.   Clearly a review of the funding matrix prior to its introduction falls outside the scope of this report. Nevertheless the other longer term issues related to unit delivery, performance measures and learner entitlement are all dependent on the operation of the new streamlined funding system. It is suggested that the impact of the new funding arrangements on these wider aspects of provision in the FE sector are kept under review in 2013-14, and a recommendation to that effect is included in the final section of this report.

Recommendations

128.   The original intention behind the identification of pathfinder providers in 2012-13 has not been realised. No commitment has yet been made to further extend the scope of unit funding from 2013-14. The late identification of Unit Delivery Research sites in 2012 has hampered the ability of sites to take forward all their plans for unit-based provision in 2012-13. There are still

potential lessons to be learned from current UDT sites before the end of the academic year.

Recommendation One

We recommend that monitoring of the work of current research sites should continue from April to July 2013 and that an updated report to the Agency in July 2013 should be produced, based on further feedback from these sites.

Recommendation Two

We recommend that a further small group of pathfinder providers should be identified for 2013-14, based on the current research sites plus up to six other providers. The remit of these pathfinder sites should be based on the current Unit Delivery Research sites, with a particular focus on employer-based provision. All pathfinders should be identified in time to begin delivery of unit-based programmes in September 2013.

129.   During 2012-13 a number of new QCF English and Maths qualifications have been recognised by Ofqual and the Agency has confirmed that individual units from these qualifications will be funded for all eligible adults in 2013-14. It has not been possible to monitor the impact of these units on English and Maths provision in 2012-13, but providers anticipate a significant development of unit-based provision in English and Maths in 2012-13. In a number of instances providers will wish to offer English and Maths units alongside other QCF units and qualifications and this might have an interesting impact on unit-based programmes in 2013-14.

Recommendation Three

We recommend that a group of six pathfinder providers should be identified for 2013-14 with a remit to offer QCF units in English and Maths alongside units drawn from other qualifications, based on a

similar remit to other pathfinders. The Agency should commission a report on this provision.

130.   Although it has not been possible to monitor and report on the plans of one provider to offer unit-based provision to employees declared to be at risk of redundancy, the needs of this group are very similar to those of unemployed people. Where formal redundancy proceedings are taken forward, local JCP offices may well be involved, so a similar relationship might be developed through JCPs for this group of learners as that already in place through the Offer for the Unemployed.

Recommendation Four

We recommend that the Unit Offer for the Unemployed should be formally extended in 2013-14 to include employees declared to be at risk of redundancy and identified to providers through JCP.

131.   The introduction of the new streamlined funding system for adult skills, and in particular the introduction of the new Funding Rates Matrix in 2013-14 is viewed with concern by some providers. Although the latest Version 3 of the Matrix allays some of these fears there remains a concern among some providers that the Matrix may undermine the QCF credit system. It is suggested that the Agency needs to monitor this particular feature of the streamlined funding system in 2013-14 to ensure it does not have an adverse impact on the flexibility of unit-based provision

Recommendation Five

We therefore recommend that the Agency should monitor the potential impact of the Funding Rates Matrix on unit-based provision during 2013-14 and should report to the Agency in 2014 on the outcomes of this monitoring

132.   The potential impact of 24+ Loans on unit delivery at Level 3 and above is a concern raised by several providers in the current project. In particular the linking of eligibility for loans to Certificates or Diplomas may

mean that unit-based provision at Level 3 will not be viable in future, even in circumstances where employers are willing to co-fund such provision.

Recommendation Six

We recommend that the Agency should continue to support unit delivery at Level 3 for all learners through the pathfinder sites and should monitor the potential impact of 24+ loans on this provision.

133.   The introduction of a credit success rate measure to run alongside a qualification success rate could have an important impact on the development of unit-based provision. In particular it will be necessary to ensure that providers have a positive incentive to offer unit-based programmes in the development of a credit success rate measure that can be applied to the outcomes of unit-based programmes without de-valuing them in relation to qualification-based provision.

Recommendation Seven

We recommend that a shadow credit success rate measure should be introduced in 2013-14 to run alongside the qualification success rate. This rate should be monitored and reported on by all providers engaged in unit-based provision, as well as by pathfinder providers.

134.   The example of unit delivery in construction skills is particularly interesting, in that it combines a method of assessment based on RPL with unit-based provision leading to credits recognised by Construction Skills as meeting a requirement for employment on a construction site in a particular skill area. It is suggested that this model might be extended further throughout the construction industry, with support from Construction Skills.

Recommendation Eight

We recommend that the Agency should initiate a project together with Construction Skills during 2013-14 that explicitly aims to extend the

model illustrated in the current research project more widely throughout the construction industry.

135.   In order to ensure that unit-based provision continues to develop within the context of the new streamlined funding system it will be necessary to redefine the concept of learner entitlement to take account of learners who may begin their learning journey on a unit-based programme, or who may wish to add units to a qualification to become recognised in a specialist skill area. In effect, a new concept of entitlement needs to be established based on the QCF credit system.

Recommendation Nine

We recommend that a new definition of learner entitlement is established for 2014-15 within the context of the new Funding Rates Matrix, based on the overall credit value of a learner's planned achievements at a particular level, rather than on a qualification. The implications of such a definition of entitlement should be monitored through the pathfinder sites during 2013-14 to ensure it supports unit-based provision.

136.   We suggest that the continued extension of unit-based provision to particular groups of learners on a year-by-year basis is already being subject to the law of diminishing returns. The administrative costs of monitoring compliance with separate eligibility criteria for unit-based provision will grow as the number of additional learners brought into the scope of such provision will diminish. The availability of Maths and English units for adults during 2013-14 will significantly increase access to unit-based provision alongside the Offer for the Unemployed, OLASS funding and continuing work through pathfinders. The continued existence of separate eligibility criteria for unit-based provision from 2014-15 will be both at odds with the principle of freedom not control in overall funding arrangements, and not cost-effective in terms of use of Agency resources.

Recommendation Ten

We therefore recommend that, from 2014-15 onwards, the availability of unit-based provision within the QCF should be extended to all eligible learners, and that mature providers should be free to determine an offer of units and/or qualifications to eligible learners, based on an assessment of their needs

137.   We recognise that such a shift in approach may have unintended consequences and may lead to some providers offering provision to learners based on opportunity costs rather than a genuine assessment of learner needs. We are confident that genuinely mature providers will make meaningful, relevant, coherent and challenging offers to learners, utilising units to enhance responsiveness to needs where appropriate. However we also recognise that government may wish to move carefully towards this unconstrained availability of units to eligible learners.

Recommendation Eleven

We recommend that in 2014-15 only providers identified as 'good' or 'outstanding' by Ofsted should be free to utilise this approach to unit funding. The impact of this approach should be monitored during 2014-15 and should then be extended to all providers from 2015-16, based on an assumed positive set of outcomes from this monitoring.

138.   It is clear from feedback from providers that, although awarding organisation systems and procedures continue to change in response to demand for registration and certification on unit-based provision, some AOs are more responsive than others in relation to provider demands. It is suggested that Ofqual has a role to play in improving quality in this area, working together with the Agency to informing providers about these different approaches and comparing AO responses to provider demands in order to improve overall practice in supporting unit delivery.

Recommendation Twelve

We recommend that Ofqual should commission in 2013-14 a comparison of AO systems and procedures, including fees and charging arrangements in three curriculum areas where qualifications are shared

or similar across a number of AOs. The Agency should support Ofqual in this work and should invite comments on its outcomes from providers.

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Annex A: The remit of the Unit Delivery Research Sites

The Unit Delivery Research Sites comprised a small group of providers, drawn from those that had engaged in previous unit delivery trial work. The 2012/13 unit research work was distinct to other unit delivery in 2012/13 because learners had to be either employed, or in full-time or part-time further education
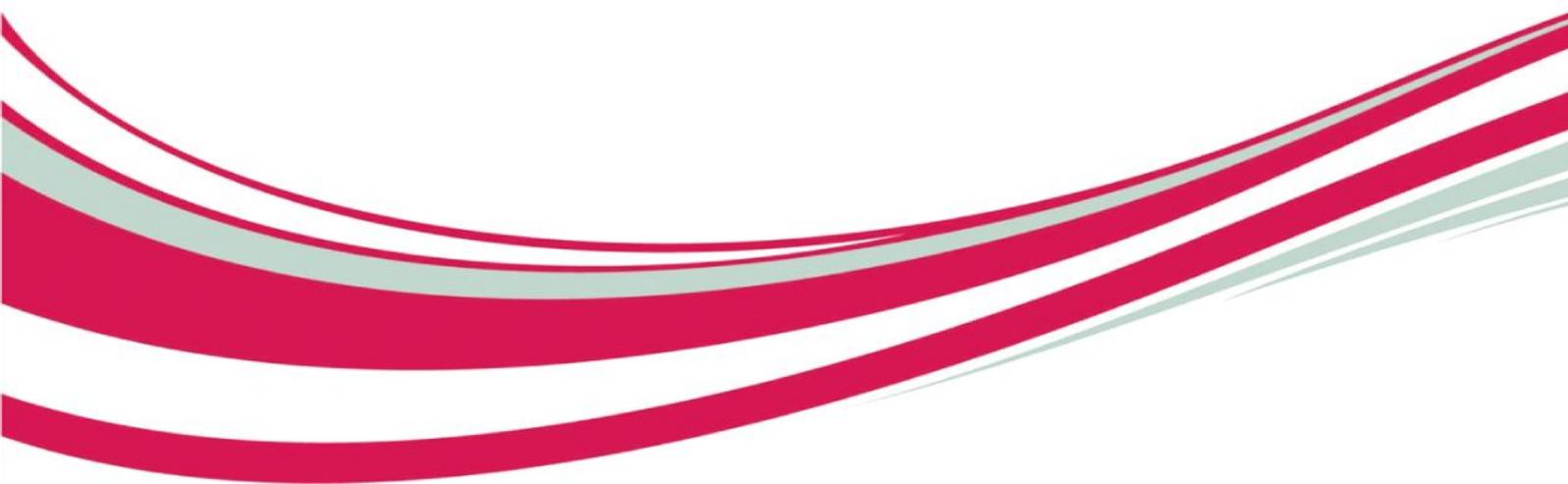
and training. This was in contrast to unemployed learners seeking work, who could undertake unit based provision through the Offer for the Unemployed. Although providers were asked to focus on delivering outside the Unit Offer for the Unemployed, they were able to deliver any unit approved for funding in 2012/13 as part of the Offer for the Unemployed.

In addition, providers participating in the unit delivery research work were expected to:

- work closely with their awarding organisation(s) (AO) to establish all the necessary processes to support unit delivery and the award of credit;
- be able to offer a unit-based curriculum to any eligible learner for whom such an offer was deemed appropriate (this was expected to be distinct from a unit-based curriculum offered by the provider as part of the offer for the unemployed, and was expected to focus in particular at level 2 and/or 3);
- put in place arrangements to ensure that all learners offered a unit-based curriculum were adequately informed and guided in their choice of units;
- ensure that each learner on a unit-based curriculum was offered a coherent, meaningful and challenging programme of learning, leading where appropriate to future qualification achievement;
- identify and report on data management and recording issues involved in supporting a unit-based curriculum offer;
- identify and report on issues relating to the registration, assessment and certification of learners offered a unit-based curriculum;
- identify and report on issues relating to the application of the 2012/13 shadow funding matrix in developing a unit-based curriculum; and
- use the Personal Learning Record (PLR) both in terms of recording achievement and also as an information, advice and guidance tool.

![niace logo - promoting adult learning]

Annex B: List of Unit Delivery Research Sites and Contacts

Research site	Research Lead
Didac Ltd	Jon Gibson
Newcastle College	Angela Allan
Axia Solutions Ltd	Sarah Stanway
Wakefield local Authority	Anne-Marie Spencer
New College Swindon	Christine Dixon
Craven College Leeds	Lindsey Johnson
Ruskin College	Audrey Mullender
Zodiac Training Limited	Mandy Corbitt
Virtual College Ltd	Alistair Gladstone
Derby City Council Adult Learning Service	Cath Harcula
Accrington and Rossendale College	Wendy Higgin
Ealing Hammersmith and W London College	David Lee