

Ref: RO36/2015

5 June 2015

Dear Responsible Officer/Unit Submitter

Closing the unit bank

Last December we wrote to you (RO29/2014) to say that during 2015 we would withdraw the Regulatory Arrangements for the Qualifications and Credit Framework (the QCF rules) and close the unit bank. This followed our review of the QCF rules and our consultation on their withdrawal (<https://www.gov.uk/government/a-consultation-on-withdrawing-the-regulatory-arrangements-for-the-qualifications-and-credit-framework.pdf>).

In that consultation we set out our proposals for how unit submitters and awarding organisations could move to a position where unit sharing is not facilitated through a central unit bank but instead units can be developed and shared directly between awarding organisations and others. The purpose of this letter is to set out in more detail how we intend to get to that point.

Winding-down unit sharing

Unit sharing is not a regulatory requirement but, in line with the original aims of the QCF, is widespread. Many units, even where they are placed into the unit bank by a single unit submitter, have been developed collaboratively by awarding organisations and employer representative groups and sometimes have been developed with public money. Units specify learning outcomes and associated assessment criteria (often based on agreed occupational standards). They do not normally specify the method of assessment, nor do they specify learning and teaching methods or content. They are often reasonably generic and many have been shared and used in qualifications for long periods of time.

In this letter we set out a pragmatic solution to achieving a structured and orderly wind-down of the unit bank. We are still consulting on the new Conditions and guidance that we propose to introduce when the QCF rules are withdrawn (<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/after-the-qcf-a-new-qualifications-framework>); we will announce the date on which we will close the unit bank after this consultation is concluded and the outcomes decided.

In the meantime, consistent with the proposals we set out in our 2014 consultation on withdrawing the QCF rules, we are now putting in place the following arrangements for the closure of the unit bank:

- If by 31 July 2015 you have not contacted our Regulatory Relationships team (Regulatory.Relationships@ofqual.gov.uk), we will assume:
 - that you do not intend to withdraw from use any of the units you have placed in the unit bank which are currently used by any awarding organisations in any regulated qualifications; and
 - that you do not object to the awarding organisations currently using those units treating them as their own; and
 - that you recognise that other awarding organisations will rely on these assumptions
- If you do not agree with some or all of these assumptions then by 5pm on 31 July 2015 you are asked to:
 - provide us with a list of the reference numbers of all those units which you plan to withdraw from shared use; and
 - notify every awarding organisation which is currently using any of those units that you intend to withdraw those units from shared use
- It remains our view that the appropriate notice period for withdrawing units will be two years. Awarding organisations which are using units that will be withdrawn will be able to continue using that unit for a period of two years from the date they are notified that the unit will be withdrawn. At the end of the two-year period, the unit should be replaced by the awarding organisation reliant on it with a unit of its own or the qualification(s) in which it appears should be withdrawn
- To minimise confusion and until the unit bank is closed, we suggest that after 31 July 2015 you do not take shared units from the unit bank and that you place any new units in the bank with a restricted status
- Later this year we will close the unit bank and from that point on there will not be a universal unit bank which is viewable by all unit submitters and awarding organisations.

Changes to RITS

In 2016 we will be introducing a new IT system to replace RITS and as part of the work to develop this system we are considering what data we should collect about each regulated qualification. In the meantime, to give immediate effect to our proposals we will make the following interim changes to RITS:

- Each awarding organisation will have access to its own bank of units made up of its own units, those shared units which it will treat as its own and until they are withdrawn, any units under notice of withdrawal
- Each awarding organisation will be able to access and edit new units that they create but will not be able to share them through our IT system (that is not to say that awarding organisations and others cannot collaborate in the design and development of units, just that they cannot be accessed through a central unit bank)
- Each awarding organisation will be able to access and edit units it has previously created but, except as above, will not be able to share them
- Each awarding organisation will be able to view copies of units that were developed by others and which it will treat as its own but will not be able to edit them
- It will continue to be possible to view all units which are used within qualifications on the current Register.

We want to minimise unnecessary burden in our approach to winding-down RITS-enabled unit sharing. The interim solution we set out here aims to minimise administrative overheads and liberates awarding organisations to change and update its units to better meet the needs of qualification users.

Next steps

If, as we encourage you to do, you intend to permit the awarding organisations using your shared units to treat those units as their own, there is nothing more for you to do. In due course we will write to you to let you know when the unit bank will close and the date on which these changes will take effect.

If you intend to withdraw your units (some or all) then we suggest you start to prepare a list of these so that by 31 July 2015, you are able to provide us with the unit reference numbers of all affected units (and by the same time, you notify all affected awarding organisations). We will write to you again shortly to let you know in what format you should provide the information to us. We will use the data you provide to create a central record of the units which are being withdrawn.

If you use units developed by others in your qualifications, you may want to ensure you have a complete record of all of these so that you can track which ones are given to you and which ones are being withdrawn.

If you have any questions about the contents of this letter and the approach we intend to take, please contact Regulatory.Relationships@ofqual.gov.uk.

Yours faithfully

Naomi Nicholson

Director of Strategic Relationships for Vocational Qualifications

Cc: Kate Crabtree, Welsh Government
Roger McCune, CCEA