



Skills Funding Agency

Changes to the Qualifications Approvals Process 2015 to 2016

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Audience	Awarding Organisations, Federation of Awarding Bodies, Joint Council for Qualifications
Security classification	OFFICIAL

Purpose

- 1 This note informs you of the changes to the qualifications approvals process we intend to introduce after the next quarterly approvals window closes on 3 September 2015.
- 2 If you have any queries about this note, please email qualifications@sfa.bis.gov.uk

Simplifying and streamlining the qualifications offer

- 3 In July 2015, the government published its productivity plan [Fixing the foundations: Creating a more prosperous nation](#), which identifies the important role of a professional and technical education system in increasing

productivity. It also emphasises the need for such a system to have a clear and high-quality set of routes to employment and higher-level skills.

- 4 Delivering the vision for professional and technical education outlined in the plan will involve a number of significant changes. These changes will apply to what is publicly funded in the future, how it is funded and how employer and local choice, demand and need influence provision. However, we believe there are immediate and interim steps we can take now to move us towards a more simplified system in terms of the qualifications we currently fund. In the autumn, in advance of the 2015 annual review, we will communicate further detail on the planned changes to the qualifications we approve for funding and how we approve them to support the productivity plan.

Assessing the Offer

- 5 In February 2015 we published the initial 2015 to 2016 qualifications offer. Since then we have run the quarterly submissions process in March and June and also included an additional one in May. After the September approvals windows closes and the updated Simplified Funding Rates Catalogue is published on 1 October 2015 we will put in place a moratorium on any further approvals for the funding year 2015 to 2016, except for the following groups of qualifications:
 - Those that are approved automatically (please refer to paragraph 51 of the [Technical Guide](#)). For example, New Tech Levels and Technical Certificates approved through the Department for Education process for inclusion of vocational qualifications in performance tables.
 - Vocational qualifications at Levels 3 and 4, which we will only approve for 24+ Advanced Learning Loans.
- 6 For vocational qualifications at Levels 3 and 4 that are eligible for 24+ Advanced Learning Loans, we will apply a simplified set of business rules. We will communicate the related timescales and process in early autumn. By exception, we may also consider qualifications at Level 2 and above that

have been developed as a direct result of employer and/or local demand, and where employers have assisted in the design or assessment of the qualification.

- 7 Temporarily suspending approvals will allow us to assess the offer and stabilise it in advance of further reform. At the start of the funding year there are already 4,500 qualifications approved for public funding, covering Entry to Level 4 and all sector subject areas.
- 8 Simultaneously, we will begin work on how to simplify and align the offer better, so that for the funding year 2016 to 2017 it is coherent and seamless for learners aged 19 to 23. We will also look at how to introduce further flexibilities for learning provided at lower levels, better enabling providers to respond directly to the priorities their localities have identified. We will say more about this in the autumn.