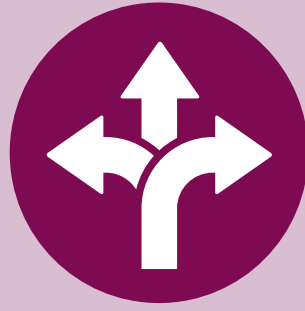


GUIDANCE



Guidance for awarding bodies on Condition F1



Guidance for awarding bodies on making fee information available to purchasers

Background

We are responsible for regulating qualifications and the qualification system in Wales.

We regulate the awarding bodies that are recognised by us to develop, deliver and award qualifications to learners in Wales. All recognised awarding bodies are subject to our rules, including those set out in the [Standard Conditions of Recognition](#).

We carried out a review of the Standard Conditions of Recognition in 2019-20 and published a revised Condition F1 that came into force on 18 January 2021. Awarding bodies told us during the review, that guidance would be helpful to support their ongoing compliance with the Conditions.

Therefore, the purpose of this document is to support awarding bodies with complying. It is not intended to be prescriptive and in this way, it is the awarding body's responsibility to determine how to comply with its conditions of recognition.

Version History

This guidance was published in January 2021.

If you have any questions or feedback on this guidance document, please email the regulatory policy team on policy@qualificationswales.org.

This document is available in [Welsh](#).

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Introduction

1.1 This guidance will outline the general principles behind Condition F1 and explore the different types of fee information for qualifications that awarding bodies must make available to potential purchasers¹ in Wales. The examples provided are for illustrative purposes only and are not intended to be definitive or to reflect all scenarios or awarding body-specific contexts. In this spirit, we expect awarding bodies to determine what fee information they must include to comply with the Conditions.

2. Information on fees for qualifications

2.1 Condition F1 of the Standard Conditions of Recognition requires an awarding body to publish fee information for potential purchasers of qualifications on its publicly available website.

2.2 Section J of the Conditions sets out the fee information we require the awarding body to include. Fee information relates to the prices an awarding body charges for its qualifications and associated services and resources.

2.3 These are either:

- i) prices that a learner or centre has to pay to have the opportunity to obtain a qualification; or
- ii) are other fees that are not essential to obtain a qualification i.e. are optional.

General Principles

2.4 The general principle of Condition F1 is to improve clarity and transparency of fee information to potential purchasers. It is important to ensure when complying with F1 that potential purchasers can easily find information and they can do so without having to ask. Similarly, when they access information, it is accurate and up to date at all times and that they can rely on this information when making purchasing and budgeting decisions, and that this equally applies whether the purchaser already has a relationship with the awarding body or is considering purchasing a qualification and wishes to explore what the awarding body offers and at what price.

¹ When we say, 'potential purchaser', we also mean 'purchaser'

2.5 Here are principles to bear in mind when seeking to comply with our requirements:

1. Provide information on fees for qualifications that meets the reasonable needs of potential purchasers;
2. Fee transparency promotes confidence in the qualifications system;
3. Make clear to potential purchasers what they will need to pay for a qualification, package of qualifications and any other applicable fees associated with delivery and assessment of a qualification, or qualifications;
4. Allow potential purchasers to distinguish between fees that are mandatory and fees that they do not have to pay to have the opportunity to obtain the qualification;
5. Enable potential purchasers to make more informed decisions and seek value for money. Fee information is one factor that potential purchasers weigh-up in their purchasing decisions, alongside quality and other considerations. The availability of information will enable considered decisions related to purchaser value for money.
6. Promote public confidence by having a greater emphasis on the quality of the qualifications and associated services and resources offered by awarding bodies and minimise risk of the market being driven by price;
7. Allow potential purchasers to proactively access fee information without requesting such information from the awarding body, having to provide information to an awarding body or enter membership or registration arrangements with an awarding body;
8. Achieve a greater level of consistency in how fees are presented across awarding bodies;
9. Provide potential purchasers with clarity and transparency, in line with Condition F1.2b, whilst safeguarding from too fine detail; and
10. Assist centres to access and use fee information in a timely manner in order to inform their planning decisions.

The 'purchaser' or 'potential purchaser'

- 2.6 Condition F1 refers to **purchasers** and **potential purchasers**. These terms are not defined in J1.8, and therefore ordinary meanings apply.
- 2.7 A **purchaser** refers to anyone who pays fees to the awarding body in order for a learner to have the opportunity to obtain a qualification. This could be the learner themselves, or often it is an examination centre that pays the fee on behalf of the learner. Purchasers include education and/or training providers such as schools, colleges, Pupil Referral Units or private work-based learning organisation. It may also include a learner undertaking a qualification independently of a provider, such as an external candidate.
- 2.8 A **potential purchaser** refers to anyone who may be seeking to purchase the awarding body's qualifications. This may be a new customer to the awarding body, or a person who has previously purchased a qualification, and equally applies to an individual learner or centre.

3. What fee information must be published

- 3.1 There are four defined terms in J1 and these outline the fee information awarding bodies must publish on their publicly accessible website.
- 3.2 The four types of fee information defined in J are:
- Standard Qualification Fee;
 - Package Fees;
 - Associated Learner Fees; and
 - Mandatory Centre Fees.
- 3.3 Awarding bodies need to ensure that all fees that they charge that fall under these four defined terms are published and are accurate at all times.
- 3.4 However, awarding bodies are not expected to itemise the components defined in Condition J1.8. What is important is that the potential purchaser can easily see what price they will need to pay to have the opportunity to obtain the

qualification. What is included in the price will need to be made clear. The awarding body ultimately needs to ensure that the price that a potential purchaser would need to pay is made clear, transparent and at all times accurate.

- 3.5 It is important that awarding bodies always keep in mind the general principles of this guidance in publishing fee information: which is to achieve clarity and transparency, and the importance of potential purchasers knowing what price they will have to pay.
- 3.6 In the same way, the awarding body must also make clear what other fees or charges a purchaser will pay if they choose to request certain products or services, such as ask for their assessment to be remarked.

The Standard Qualification Fee (SQF)

- 3.7 The Standard Qualification Fee (SQF) represents the **mandatory fees/charges** that must be paid by, or on behalf of an individual learner in order for them to have the opportunity to obtain one of the awarding body's qualifications, including a certificate in relation to it. This type of fee information will include all elements that a purchaser will have to pay throughout the process i.e. from the enrolment or registration through to obtaining the certificate.
- 3.8 Typically, registration and enrolment fees are included here and therefore must be published. In addition, there may be other charges that are mandatory, such as an additional fee for issuing a certificate or for a practical assessment. Similarly, if assessment materials or a textbook must be purchased in order to have the opportunity to obtain the qualification, then this would be included as part of the fee information, as it is mandatory for potential purchasers to pay. Where there are no additional charges for specific products or services, then it's important that the awarding body makes this clear too in its published information.
- 3.9 What information applies will depend on the business model of individual awarding bodies. The following examples are provided as guidance, but will not necessarily apply in all cases:



Figure 1 - Examples of mandatory fees that could make up the Standard Qualification Fee.

3.10 Awarding bodies may have different pricing structures and approaches for the different qualifications it offers. All mandatory elements of the fees must be included and shown clearly on a qualification-by-qualification basis.

3.11 Similarly, within a given qualification, there may sometimes be different routes or combinations that a learner can take. Where there are more than one route/combination in use, we are not expecting awarding bodies to publish fees for just one route, nor every combination, but rather to provide transparent and clear information on the probable route(s) or combinations. Ultimately, the total price needs to be made clear to purchasers.

3.12 Awarding bodies may offer different pricing options or other discounts. It may therefore be useful to include an explanatory note on the website to make potential purchasers aware where discounts and reductions may be applicable.

3.13 Here we explore other factors that awarding bodies may need to consider when determining what is included in the Standard Qualification Fee:

Qualification size	<p>Many awarding organisations offer subject-specific qualifications that are different in size. For General Qualifications, these may include a short course, single award, or double award or where appropriate, individual unit fees. For vocational qualifications these may include an award, certificate, diploma, or extended diploma.</p> <p>Typically, fees will vary depending upon the size of the qualification. For transparency, an awarding body would need to provide the potential purchaser with fee information relating to each of the size options available to a learner for a qualification.</p>
Assessment structures	<p>Where unitised assessment arrangements are in place for a qualification, awarding bodies must publish the fees by unit as well as for the full qualification. For transparency, the number of units a learner would need to be entered/registered for, to achieve the full qualification would assist the purchaser with calculations, as the sum of the unit fees may differ from the qualification fee if paid in full.</p>
Recurring fees	<p>Where fees are payable more than once, awarding bodies should clearly indicate the number of payments required, and state whether fees/charges would be fixed for the duration of the qualification, or for each unit.</p>
Centre discounts	<p>Awarding organisations can negotiate discounts on any of its fees (including those that fall within the Standard Qualification Fee) with potential purchasers, for example based on their expected cohort size, or to reflect their role in developing or delivering the qualification.</p> <p>The Standard Qualification Fee should reflect the typical price that purchasers would pay. If discounts can be applied, then awarding bodies should note this on the same page on the website.</p>

Package Fees

- 3.14 Package Fees for the purpose of complying with the Conditions is defined in Section J, and includes fees that an awarding body charges when they make a qualification available as part of a package together with other optional products and/or services.
- 3.15 Condition F2.1 requires that qualifications that are made available in a package must also be made available separately to that package. In the same way, the fee information associated with the qualification will also be published separately to any package.

Associated Learner Fees (ALF)

- 3.16 Associated Learner Fees represent any fee that a learner would have to pay but only if they request/choose to purchase that service and/or product from the

awarding body. Learners do not have to have these services and/or goods to have the opportunity to obtain the qualification.

- 3.17 Awarding bodies must publish **all optional products and services** directly related to the delivery and award of qualifications offered. Examples may include fees for remarking, appeals or a late entry fee. Other charges not directly related to the delivery and/ or award of the qualification, such as car parking fees, or other teaching materials, are outside the scope.
- 3.18 Where there are Associated Learner Fees, awarding bodies need to consider how they publish this information alongside the Standard Qualification Fee and any other related fees on the website so that the potential purchaser is clear of the various fees and charges.
- 3.19 Here are examples of some types of fee information that may fall under Associated Learner Fees, depending on the individual awarding body's business model:



Figure 2 – Examples of common Associated Learner Fees

- 3.20 There are some products and services that, depending on the awarding body's policy, could fall into more than one category. It's important to reiterate that we do not require awarding bodies to publish fee information broken down by category. Rather, to follow the principle of clarity and transparency for potential purchasers.
- 3.21 This next section provides some guidance on certain products and services for which some awarding bodies may charge and depending on the context, they may sit under SQF or ALF fees:

Professional membership	<p>When an awarding body also acts as the professional body and only allows a learner to take its qualifications if they are members, professional memberships would be considered part of the Standard Qualification Fee – a price they must pay to seek to obtain the qualification.</p> <p>Professional membership fees may be an Associated Learner Fee where they are not a mandatory requirement or prerequisite of the awarding body's qualification, but the learner could become a member of the professional body if they chose to do so. Fees would only apply where membership is associated with the qualification.</p> <p>Potential purchasers would also require information regarding the length of the membership (annual, 5 years, or lifetime) and the point in time where membership fees become payable (registration, assessment or certification stage).</p>
Resits	<p>Where a learner chooses to resit a qualification or unit and where an awarding body charges for it, this would be a choice for the learner/ potential purchaser whether they would go ahead and take the resit.</p> <p>Due to this optional element the fee information would need to be published as it falls under an Associated Learner Fee defined in J.</p> <p>Where an awarding body offers 'free' resit(s) this would be clearly stated and included on the website as part of the fee information.</p>
Textbooks	<p>Textbooks and other qualification-specific learning materials published by the awarding body that are not required for the assessment would be considered as an optional charge, payable only where a learner chooses to purchase these materials from the awarding body. If optional, then these prices should be included in the fee information published, clearly indicating that it's optional – as defined under the Associated Learner Fee.</p> <p>Where the awarding body requires the purchaser to buy textbooks and other learning materials in order to seek to obtain the qualification, fee information in relation to these must be included on the website as defined by the Standard Qualification Fee.</p>

Mandatory Centre Fees

3.22 These fees represent all mandatory fees that must be **paid by a Centre** to deliver qualifications, but that are not included in the Standard Qualification Fee for the qualifications. These fees would typically be levied either at Centre level or at a cohort level.

3.23 Examples of Centre level and cohort level fees include, but are not limited to:

Centre level fees	Cohort level fees
Initial Centre Approval fees (new centres)	Moderation fees levied at a cohort or Centre level
Annual Centre fees	Fees related to the delivery of specific qualifications
Fees for periodic, mandatory visits, e.g. for audit or quality assurance, including additional visits due to identified quality issues and other centre visits where these are dictated by the awarding body	Fees that are not related to a specific qualification
Qualification approval	Fees for transferring a learner from one centre to an alternative centre inside or outside of the UK
Access to the awarding body's online portals/systems	Fees relating to learner or cohort withdrawal from a specific

Minimum spending thresholds

3.24 Where awarding bodies apply minimum spending thresholds, the terms relating to their application should be published alongside each spending threshold. This would also apply where awarding bodies have minimum thresholds registrations and/or exam entries.

4. Guidance on how to publish information

4.1 Condition F requires that fee information is:

- published on a publicly facing website (definition on published in J);
- kept up to date (F1.2a);
- clear to a potential purchaser (F1.2b);
- easily accessible to any potential purchaser without that person having to request it from, or provide any information to, the awarding body (F1.2c)

Accessibility of fee information

4.2 To comply with Condition F1.2, fee information must be published on the awarding body's website and that is open to the public. It is important that potential purchasers can access fee information efficiently without having to ask.

- 4.3 It is important that potential purchasers have access to the same fee information as existing purchasers, without having to contact the awarding body, enter into membership agreements or commercial contracts or log in to a secure system to receive this information.
- 4.4 Awarding bodies are encouraged to consider the location of fee information on their website to minimise the level of navigation needed by a potential purchaser to locate the awarding body's fees and charges.

Keeping fee information up to date

- 4.5 Awarding bodies are required to maintain the accuracy of their fee information at all times. Therefore, awarding bodies need to keep published fee information under regular review and update published information regularly to add, remove and revise published fee information to reflect changes to fees.
- 4.6 In addition to Condition F1.2, other Conditions state that information for purchasers and users of qualifications must not be misleading (**Condition B5.2**), or in the instance where the status of an awarding body's qualifications change or are withdrawn, information must be clear and accurate (**Condition D6.6**).

Clear information

- 4.7 Information must be clear to potential purchasers. Examples of ways that an awarding body may consider in order to make fee information clear to a potential purchaser include, but are not limited to:
- clearly displaying different types of fees for example, unit fees and full qualification fees, where it is possible to pay for individual unit entry or registrations;
 - logically structuring and making clear links from mandatory and non-mandatory fees to specific chargeable qualifications, products and/or services;
 - providing sales, marketing and customer (purchaser)-facing staff with appropriate training on mandatory and optional fees and where applicable, what is included in these fees, prior to being published; and
 - taking positive and timely action to resolve identified issues relating to the clarity of published fee information raised by purchasers or other users of information on fees of qualifications.

4.8 Some practical examples of ways to support potential purchasers further with fee information include:

- Published Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ);
- Email or telephone contact details for an appropriate department or member of staff; and
- Online chat/video chat platforms.

4.9 In addition, bear in mind the following considerations to provide potential purchasers with a greater level of clarity:

Variations in fees/charges	Currency of pricing	Proportionate fees/charges	Point of time fees
Fees may or may not vary by qualification. Where they do not vary, they need not be repeated.	Make clear when, or at what time published fees apply.	Where fees are set as a percentage of the SQF, present this fee in that way, rather than publishing the actual values relevant to each qualification.	Where fees become payable after a stated point in time, clear timeline would need to be made clear e.g., entry withdrawals made within 2 months.

Figure 3 – Further tips for improving the clarity of fee information.

Making fee information available to satisfy the planning requirements of purchasers

4.10 Awarding bodies are required to make information available sufficiently far in advance to satisfy the reasonable planning requirements of potential purchasers (F1.3). This requirement is important so that purchasers can effectively plan:

- curriculum plans and prospectuses;
- budgets and financial arrangements and constraints, including reconciling accounts and invoicing;
- numbers of learners (learner registrations and exam entries);
- staffing requirements and timetabling of provision;

- resources, including IT systems and software, textbooks, subject-specific equipment; and
- payment deadlines including, awarding body invoice payment policies, accounts submissions, and payment of fees for remarking or requests for reviews.

4.11 A purchaser's need for timely fee information may differ depending on when in the academic year, cohorts of learners need to be registered and/or entered for assessment. Timely publishing of fee information will allow potential purchasers time to make informed decisions when choosing between awarding bodies and time to publish information about qualifications.

5. Fee information statements

5.1 Although it is a requirement that all awarding bodies comply with Condition F1.1(a) to F1.1(d) and F1.3, any exceptions will be rare and temporary.

5.2 We consider that this will **only apply in exceptional circumstances**, where the awarding body can demonstrate that complying with the requirements of one or more of these Conditions is not possible at a specific point in time.

5.3 Where it is not possible for an awarding body to calculate and publish fee information required under F1.1 immediately, in accordance with F1.3 it must take all reasonable steps to publish the information required sufficiently far in advance of the time the qualification will be made available to learners. This is to ensure that potential purchasers are able to make timely planning decisions of their own.

5.4 Where the above is not possible, and we expect this to be very rare, Condition F1.4 requires the awarding body to:

- provide sufficient information to the potential purchaser to give a reasonable indication of its likely fees (i.e. indicative fees);
- together with a clear statement to make potential purchasers aware that this information is only indicative.

5.5 If producing holding statements, awarding bodies are encouraged to provide potential purchasers with:

1. a clear and valid rationale for not publishing timely fee information required of Condition F1.1(a) – F1.1(d); and
2. a specific date by when fee information will be available on the awarding body's publicly facing website.

5.6 The fee statement needs to be clear and readily capable of being understood by potential purchasers.

6. Monitoring and research activities

6.1 From time to time, Qualifications Wales may request fee information from awarding bodies for the purposes of carrying out its regulatory functions. Where fee information is not found to be available on the publicly facing website or information that is available is unclear or in some non-compliant, we may ask for this information.

7. Further information and support

7.1 We keep our guidance under review and if you have any feedback on it or would like additional support about the Conditions, then please contact the Regulatory Policy Team on policy@qualificationswales.org.