

External Quality Assurance Policy

1 What is External Quality Assurance?

- 1.1 Skills and Education Group Awards¹, through its external moderation policy, ensures that approved Centres provide learners with access to fair and reliable assessment opportunities, and that evidence of learner achievement meets the standard required by the published learning outcomes and assessment criteria of our qualifications. It confirms the authenticity, validity and objectivity of assessor practice.
- 1.2 It is expected that Centres will have a minimum of one annual quality assurance engagement per sub-sector (curriculum area) dependent upon the type, volume and nature of the qualifications/units offered.
- 1.3 It is a flexible system which may be applied at any time of the year but usually towards the end of a course, or when learners have completed all planned assessment requirements.
- 1.4 Centres are expected to keep learners informed about the external moderation process and must make it clear to learners that achievement cannot be confirmed until moderation has taken place.
- 1.5 Where external quality assurance is undertaken with a face to face visit, additional quality checks are made to ensure continued compliance with our Centre Agreement, policies and procedures.

2 Who carries out External Quality Assurance?

- 2.1 We train, appoint², and monitor external quality assurers who carry out the external quality assurance process on our behalf.
- 2.2 All external quality assurers are subject specialists and have detailed knowledge of the sub-sector and administrative arrangements to support the qualifications/units they quality assure. They are appointed according to set criteria and are inducted and trained in our policies and procedures.

¹ Skills and Education Group Awards is a recognised awarding organisation and part of the Skills and Education Group.

² We do not currently require checks through the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) (previously known as CRB) for our external quality assurers, unless required specifically to do so, as the frequency and nature of contact with learners during moderation activity is considered minimal and low risk. No quality assurer is allowed to have access to any learner without other appropriate adults being in attendance.

- 2.3 External quality assurers act as our representatives liaising with Centres to sample and confirm assessment decisions. They review the Centre's internal assessment and quality assurance process, and confirm the evidence of achievement meets the assessment standards.
- 2.4 In addition, they offer advice and guidance to Centre staff in order to support continuous improvement. They encourage and support Centres in providing the most appropriate modes of evidence collection for the learner.
- 2.5 External quality assurers deal directly with Centres and it is the Centre's responsibility to deal directly with all learners' queries. Under no circumstances, must Centres encourage or advise learners to contact us or our external quality assurers directly.

3 How we externally quality assure

- 3.1 External quality assurance is planned according to the Course End Date submitted by the Centre at enrolment. This Course End Date should be the date the Centre anticipates the course will be finished i.e. course delivery; assessment³ and internal quality assurance⁴ have been completed by **all** learners unless withdrawn.
- 3.2 The Centre must make **all** learners' work available for quality assurance.
 - 3.2.1 Work must be complete, authenticated, cross-referenced against the learning outcomes/assessment criteria, assessed and internally quality assured. External quality assurance should not be arranged until assessment and internal quality assurance are complete and the Centre is ready to claim learner certification.
 - 3.2.2 Each learner portfolio or piece of assessment evidence, if submitted for external quality assurance separately, must include the learner's signed Declaration of Authenticity⁵.
- 3.3 The External quality assurer will:
 - 3.3.1 confirm the date, type and requirements of quality assurance with the Centre;
 - 3.3.2 verify assessment decisions made in line with our sampling requirements;

³ See Delivering and Assessing Qualifications

⁴ See Internal Quality Assurance of Qualifications

⁵ Available to download from the website

3.3.3 carry out a quality audit of a Centre's delivery, assessment and internal quality assurance procedures;

3.3.4 offer advice and guidance to Centres on administrative procedures, physical and staff resources, and any technical issues relating to the learning outcomes and assessment criteria;

3.3.5 confirm requests for credit transfer and exemption where the learner has already achieved sufficient credits or qualifications that evidence prior achievement;

3.3.6 prepare a quality assurance report for the Centre which includes, when appropriate, an action plan⁶ listing actions to be taken in order that the full requirements of our procedures and the qualification assessment are met;

Examples of assessment practice that are likely to lead to intervention and actions from the external quality assurer include but are not limited to:

- Inconsistency of assessment decisions;
- Insufficiently qualified staff;
- Assessment tasks not valid or fit for purpose;
- Poor assessment practice;
- Insufficient records;
- Authenticity of learners' work;
- Insufficient learner evidence.

3.3.7 follow-up action plans with Centres following the release of the report.

3.4 Centres which fail to comply with any action plans may incur sanctions⁷ resulting in one or more of the following:

- the requirement for additional support and moderation;
- suspension of moderation activity;
- suspension of learner registration/certification; or in more serious cases;
- the suspension or removal of qualification approval / Centre recognition.

⁶ A provisional action plan is discussed with the centre at the time of a visit and confirmed when the final report is despatched to the centre.

⁷ Cf. ABC Sanctions Policy

4 Types of External Quality Assurance

4.1 Centres will be approved for one of the following types of external quality assurance. The type will be dependent on the status of the Centre and/ or specific requirements of the qualification. We will always determine the type of moderation to be allocated and advise the moderator accordingly.

4.2 External Quality Assurance Visits

4.2.1 Centres will be allocated an external quality assurer per sub-sector (curriculum area) who will contact Centre staff to arrange a mutually convenient date, time and place for the visit.

4.2.2 It is anticipated that a quality assurance visit will take 4 hours, but the sample size and issues encountered at the Centre may reduce/extend this.

4.2.3 During the visit the Centre will be expected to make available:

- **all** assessed learner evidence for which the centre will be claiming certification;
- personnel associated with the qualifications/units being externally quality assured e.g. tutors, assessors and internal quality assurers;
- learners⁸ (maximum 6) with whom the external quality assurer can discuss delivery and assessment provision at the Centre. Where learners are unavailable Centres are expected to provide their own evaluations.

4.2.4 The Centre is expected to inform the external quality assurer if an arranged visit cannot go ahead as planned. We reserve the right to charge for any pre-arranged visit that the Centre cancels without sufficient or reasonable notice, and the right to invoice and require payment of visit fees before the visit takes place. Repeated cancellation of external quality assurance may incur sanctions.

4.2.5 Following a visit, the Centre may feedback on the external quality assurance process. This feedback can be through the External Quality Assurance Report Form, separate contact with Customer Support or submitted via the website.

⁸ External Moderators will not interview learners alone. They are required to interview learners in a group or with a member of centre staff present. Learner names will not be used when submitting feedback.

4.2.6 Centre responsibilities

In order to facilitate an efficient and timely moderation the Centre will be expected to complete the following once they have been given details of their External Moderator:

- to liaise with their External Quality Assurer and determine an appropriate date and time for the visit i.e. when assessment and internal quality assurance are complete;
- to complete the required sections (Planner Sections 4-7) of the external quality assurance report form and to return this via email to the External Quality Assurer at least 5 working days prior to the visit;
- to ensure they have met all other requirements by referring to the checklist provided when we confirm the name of the External Quality Assurer.

4.3 Remote Moderation

4.3.1 Remote moderation is undertaken when a face to face visit from an External Quality Assurer is not required. Remote or postal quality assurance of assessed work is usually conducted in the following circumstances:

- for established Centres with a positive moderation record;
- for reviewing additional samples following a visit;
- when it is an appropriate method of quality assurance for the Centre e.g. where there are distance learners;
- when it is an appropriate method of quality assurance for the qualification e.g. language qualifications where multiple specialists are required.

4.3.2 Centres will be informed of the sample of evidence required by the External Quality Assurer approximately 10 working days prior to the submitted course end date. These samples must either be:

- forwarded⁹ to the external quality assurer within 10 working days after the course end date; or
- the external quality assurer given remote access to the Centre's ePortfolio system. The Centre is advised to read our guidance on eModeration and to contact us before the course has finished ensuring that any potential technical problems do not delay the external quality assurance process.

⁹ If evidence is sent by post the Centre is expected to bear the cost of the postage

4.3.3 Centre responsibilities

- to liaise with their external quality assurer to confirm when samples will be despatched if not ready or available earlier;
- to complete the required sections (Planner Sections 4-8) of the remote quality assurance report form and to send this via email with or at the same time as the requested samples;
- to explain why samples requested have not been sent. Failure to explain why samples are unavailable will delay the process;
- to ensure you have met all other requirements by referring to the instructions provided in an email by the External Quality Assurer. Not least to include the following with the unit evidence provided:
 - Learners' Declarations of Authenticity;
 - Assessment Summary evidence for all cohorts included in this external quality assurance;
 - Internal Quality Assurance Plan and Summary of internal quality assurance undertaken.

4.4 Additional Quality Assurance

4.4.1 Following external quality assurance there may be a requirement for additional external quality assurance to take place. This is likely to occur where:

- the Centre was not fully prepared and the external quality assurance could not be completed;
- the External Quality Assurer has made changes to the Centre's assessment decisions which necessitates further assessment and subsequent sampling.

4.4.2 Centres will be charged in each case and sanctions may also be applied.

4.5 Direct Claims

4.5.1 Under certain conditions we will allow Centre claims for certification between external quality assurance engagements. Please refer to our Direct Claims Policy.

4.5.2 Evidence of assessment decisions and the internal quality assurance process will be required for review at the next external quality assurance for all courses certificated under Direct Claims.

5 Retention of Assessment Evidence

5.1 Centres must retain all assessment evidence securely until external quality assurance has been completed and the period for appeals has elapsed.

5.1.1 Centres wishing to appeal against the External Quality Assurers' decision must retain the original evidence for any appeal requested. Enquiries or appeals against quality assurance decisions must be made in writing to complianceandregulation@skillsedugroup.co.uk within the timescales specified.¹⁰

5.2 Centres are required to keep records of assessment and internal quality assurance for a period of seven years. Please refer to our requirements for Centre Record Keeping on the website.

6 Malpractice and Maladministration

6.1 External quality assurers who suspect malpractice/maladministration or inequality during the external quality assurance process will communicate their findings directly to Compliance and Regulation in a separate report.

6.2 Centre staff who suspect malpractice on the part of learners or other Centre staff must inform Compliance and Regulation using the Notification of Suspected Malpractice (MM2) available on the website.¹¹

7 Sanctions

7.1 Our external quality assurers may recommend sanctions as an outcome of external quality assurance activity where they suspect malpractice / maladministration or they consider assessment decisions to be unsafe or inadequate. Recommendations for sanctions¹² must be approved by Compliance and Regulation who will communicate which sanctions are to be applied, the reasons for those sanctions and the actions required as a result.

¹⁰ See Enquiries and Appeals Policy

¹¹ See Malpractice and Maladministration Policy

¹² See Sanctions Policy

8 Standardisation

We may, either directly or through our External Quality Assurers, ask for copies of learner assessment evidence for the purposes of standardisation. Centres are required to cooperate with all such requests to enable us to meet our Conditions of Recognition and to ensure that qualification standards are being met consistently across all those involved in the quality assurance process.

9 Quality Assurance

- 9.1 We quality assure our external quality assurance process through a programme of self assessment, peer observations, report reviews and customer feedback.
- 9.2 This policy and guidance is reviewed annually to ensure it continues to meet the needs of our centres and Regulators.¹³

¹³ Ofqual in England; Qualifications Wales; CCEA Regulation in NI