



Post Approval Monitoring of Approved Centres

Awarding Body Relationship with Approved Centres

Awarding Bodies are obliged by the regulator (SQA Accreditation) to have in place arrangements for the management of delivery of their qualifications by centres (SQA Accreditation Regulatory Principles 2014) to ensure that the administrative obligations for centres are as clear and streamlined as possible centres enter into a written agreement with the Awarding Body (ECITB Approved Centre Recognition).

Provided within this section are details of the management, monitoring and external quality assurance arrangements for post approval monitoring of approved centres.

Approved centres must inform the Awarding Body of any change, which affects the centre's ability to continue to meet the full requirements of the approval recognition.

All approved centres are required to send an appropriate representative to approved centre standardisation meetings arranged annually on a regional basis and hosted by the ECITB Awarding Body. The purpose of these briefing sessions is to provide an opportunity to exchange information and to update centres on any changes to the ECITB qualification systems. Attendance at these meetings is mandatory and considered by the ECITB Awarding Body to be an integral and essential part of its qualification quality assurance system.

Monitoring Visit Requests

Awarding Bodies must monitor and maintain the quality and consistency of assessment practices within and between their Approved Centres offering the same qualification as part of the quality assurance and control arrangements.

Approved centres must understand their obligation to comply with any Awarding Body requests for access to premises, records, information, candidates, and assessment team staff for the purposes of monitoring or the external quality assurance of a centre. This will ensure every site/location affiliated to a main centre is subject to the same standard of quality assurance as the main centre.

Where a centre fails to provide such access, the Awarding Body must take the appropriate remedial action in line with requirements of the tariff of sanctions (see Sanctions Policy).

Approved centres must have a legitimate reason to cancel monitoring or external quality assurance visits at short notice. Where this cannot be established then the Awarding Body will reserve the right to withhold any claim for certification until a monitoring visit has been completed. Notification of cancellation must be received in writing at least 10 working days in advance of the visit. If such notice is not provided, the Awarding Body will reserve the right to charge the centre for the cost of the visit. Approved centres must be aware that both Awarding Bodies and the regulator reserve the right to perform such visits at short notice or without prior notification in order to minimise the risk of unsubstantiated claims for certification.

External Quality Assurance

External quality assurer visits will be an integral part of the Awarding Body quality assurance and monitoring strategy. The normal frequency of external quality assurance and monitoring visits to centres is a minimum of two per year. Where a centre has no registered candidates only one visit per year will be carried out. If no candidates are registered within an 18 month period steps may be taken to withdraw centre approval.

The external quality assurer will work to the ECITB Awarding Body & Approved Centre Code of Practice.

Visit patterns will be reflected by how an approved centre is operating based on risk assessment of the quantitative and qualitative data gathered by the Awarding Body. Normally, each approved centre will be visited at least every six months. Newly approved centres and centres that do not have a proven track record may require more than two visits per year. The exact frequency and duration of external quality assurance visits will reflect the approved centre's performance and volume and throughput of candidates.

These visits provide an important opportunity for centres to clarify questions about Awarding Body guidance or requirements, and for external quality assurers to update centre staff on new issues. However, the main purpose of a visit is to monitor the quality and consistency of assessment decisions and practices within a centre.

Monitoring

The external quality assurer will inform the approved centre in advance of the planned activity in order to agree the scope of the visit and the quality assurance and sampling activities that will take place. In order to do this, access to information on a centre's activities is necessary to:

- confirm that centres continue to meet the requirements of the ECITB Approved Centre Recognition
- confirm that assessments are conducted by appropriately qualified and competent staff
- sample assessment decisions to confirm that they are valid and authentic and that the national standards are being consistently maintained
- confirm that assessment decisions are regularly sampled through formative and summative internal quality assurance practice to ensure the accuracy of assessment decisions against the national standards
- check claims for certification to ensure that they are valid and authentic and supported by auditable records
- confirm that centres have implemented any Awarding Body action plan
- advise centres on the interpretation of the national standards
- advise centres on the Awarding Body requirements and procedures, including access to fair assessment and appeals against Awarding Body decisions
- provide centres with up to date information and advice in line with Awarding Body and regulator's guidance and requirements

Monitoring Procedures

The external quality assurer will communicate with the approved centre contact to arrange a visit. The purpose of the visit must be clarified (requests for arrangements to see specific candidate portfolios may be made at this time). Approved centres must not release portfolios to candidates for whom they have requested a certificate. Candidate portfolios must be kept in the approved centre within a locked and secured area until the external quality assurer has had the opportunity to sample the content.

The external quality assurer will obtain the following details and documentation for the approved centre from the Awarding Body database:

- full list of named candidates registered with the approved centre to include the candidate registration number, qualification registered and date of registration
- number of certificates issued from the date of the last monitoring visit to include the candidate name, any Unique Learner Number, the title of the qualification or units and credit achieved and date of certificate issue
- completed copy of the previous VQ021 *Post approval centre monitoring report* form and agreed action plan (where applicable)
- completed copy of the ECITB Approved Centre Recognition form
- complete list of assessors and internal quality assurers, registered with the Awarding Body by the approved centre to include Assessor/IQA status, qualification(s) they are approved to assess/quality assure, and registration numbers

The external quality assurer will carry out the monitoring visit using the internal and external quality assurance sampling plans and strategies and the above-mentioned documents. The systems and procedures as listed within this manual and other documents as issued by the Awarding Body or the regulator and referred to within this manual, may also be used during the monitoring visit.

Access to Fair Assessment

Arrangements will be discussed during every monitoring visit to ensure that any candidate with particular assessment requirements has access to systems and procedures which will enable them to demonstrate their attainment. (See Equal Opportunities Policy & Reasonable adjustments and Special Considerations Policy for full details.)

Feedback and Monitoring Visit Report

The external quality assurer on completion of the monitoring visit audit will provide the centre co-ordinator or representative with a discussed and agreed interim copy of the VQ021 *Post approval centre monitoring report* form. A copy will also be forwarded by the external quality assurer to the Awarding Body's Lead Quality Assurer for review and comment. This will be forwarded to the ECITB VQ administrator. The VQ administrator will action any administrative requests made within the report, sending a copy of the report by email and post to the approved centre contact. A copy will be retained on the approved centre file for reference & audit purposes. The final report should be received by the centre within 20 working days of the date of the visit.

Where necessary, the external quality assurer will arrange a follow up visit to review and monitor any corrective actions. This arrangement will be agreed by the Lead Quality Assurer, the external quality assurer and named persons from the approved centre assessment team within the "action plan" section of the report.

Other documents may be appended to the VQ021 where appropriate.

The VQ021 audit report will include:

- date of the audit visit
- the monitoring and quality assurance activities undertaken, including information on the sample, any audits conducted and who was interviewed during the visit

- any changes in centre staff or their competence since the last visit
- explicit feedback to the centre on the quality and consistency of the assessment process and the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance arrangements
- areas of good practice against the requirements of the approved centre recognition
- any actions to be taken by the centre where performance does not meet the requirements of the approved centre recognition - this will include time-scales and the names of the individuals responsible for the implementation of the actions
- confirmation that the centre has implemented the action plan from the previous monitoring report

Risk Assessment Strategy

The ECITB has implemented the use of an approved centre risk assessment strategy. The risk assessment is mandatory and to be completed annually by the approved centre. The Awarding Body will review the risk assessment. Where necessary the external quality assurer and the approved centre contact will agree an action plan which will be implemented to ensure any high risk areas identified during the assessment are being monitored and sufficiently controlled to ensure the quality and rigour of the qualification.

The risk assessment will look at assessing the:

- potential risks — concerned with determining the extent to which various sources of risk are to be found in approved centres and will be based on factual and numerical information
- quality of risk control — concerned with determining the effectiveness of the management controls that are operating within an approved centre

The separation of potential risks and quality of risk control allows any combination of high and low risk scores. For example, a centre may score high on potential risks because they are exposed to many sources of risk but score low on quality of risk control because they are managing those risk factors extremely well.

The common scores for the risk factors are:

1. high risk,
2. moderate risk
3. low risk,
4. minimal risk

Certification

The Awarding Body will ensure that the approved centre has adequate safeguards in place to prevent either a mistaken or fraudulent claim for credit or qualification certification being made. Any issue of replacement certificates, whatever their form, will be explicitly labelled as such and only issued subject to all reasonable steps being taken to authenticate the claim.

Direct claims status will not be granted to Approved Centres until after the initial cohort of candidates has been certificated and an EQA judgement has confirmed approval.

Extensions to Existing Approval

Any approved Centre wishing to extend its existing approval for additional qualifications or any individual units must complete the VQ001c form 'Application For Additional ECITB Scheme Approval'. Applications must clearly indicate on the form if the Approved Centre has been refused Approved Centre status or have any tariffs or sanctions currently placed on them. Notification of any extensions given to the centre must also be indicated on the VQ001c. The focus of the Awarding Body in considering the application must be on whether the centre can comply with the qualification specific requirements and, in particular, the competence and occupational experience of assessors and internal quality assurers, together with the centre's ability to provide access to the require assessment opportunities for the candidates. A visit to the centre will normally be required to confirm a new approval; however where no visit is considered necessary the centre will be required to provide sufficient evidence to support its application. The records will be retained for audit purposes.

Suspended or Withdrawn Approval

Where the Awarding Body quality assurance activities provide evidence that a centre is failing to meet the full requirements of the approved centre recognition, or there have been several inconsistencies and/or candidate complaints concerning the centre, or there has been allegations of malpractice the Awarding Body will institute procedures to maintain the integrity of awards. (See Malpractice and maladministration policy). These procedures will be commensurate with the problem and will require set dates when corrective actions must be completed. A tariff of sanctions that will be applied by the Awarding Body can be found in Sanctions Policy.

Where any approved centre has its approval formally withdrawn the Awarding Body has a duty to inform the regulator. Information that will be provided to the regulator will include:

- the centre's registration number
- name and address of centre
- title, level, identifier number and name of the qualification/s being withdrawn

The external quality assurer will identify from the Awarding Body database all candidate certificates requested by the approved centre. If candidate certificates have not being issued within an 18 month period this will be a major monitoring topic for the six-monthly visit. The approved centre must be aware that if candidate certificates are not being raised, then approved centre status may be suspended or withdrawn. Candidate registrations and progress will be discussed before any suspension or withdrawal is considered. The external quality assurer will seek confirmation of continuing candidate progress by the approved centre.

Where due cause or major non-compliance is confirmed the ECITB Awarding Body reserves the right to refuse or rescind any approved centre status. The approved centre will have the right to invoke the appeals procedures of this manual, Appeals Policy, if they disagree with the decision of the Awarding Body.

Monitoring of External Quality Assurer Performance

- Copies of all external quality assessor visit plans will be sent to the Lead Quality Assurer. This will enable the Lead Quality Assurer to monitor workload.
- Copies of all centre visit reports and monitoring forms will be sent to the Lead Quality Assurer. This will enable the Lead Quality Assurer to review activity and outcome of centre visits.
- Copies of any centre action plans resulting from visits will be sent to the Lead Quality Assurer. The Lead Quality Assurer will then monitor the external quality assessor's performance in ensuring the action plan is followed through by informal e-mail and telephone contact.
- The Lead Quality Assurer or other appropriate person will accompany each external quality assessor on one centre visit per year and will monitor performance against the guidance contained within the ECITB Awarding Body & Approved Centre Code of Practice. This will be a formal annual performance and contract review.
- Centres are encouraged to contact the Accountable Officer if they experience any issues or problems with their external quality assessor.

Review Arrangements

We will review this procedure as part of our continuous improvement arrangements and revise it, as and when necessary, in response to customer, learner or regulatory feedback (e.g. to align with any enquiries process established by the regulators) and to identify any trends that may emerge in the subject matter of enquiries received.

Contact us

If you have any queries about any aspect of this process, please contact:

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