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External Quality Assurance Sampling Strategy

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External Quality Assurance Sampling Strategy – Aim and Purpose

EQA Reviews need to be carried out for every centre who are delivering NCFE qualifications and will be undertaken either remotely or face-to-face. Activities included in the external quality assurance review are:

- (a) consideration of assessment and internal quality assurance undertaken by the centre since the last EQA review
- (b) where appropriate, observation of one or more assessments being taken, and / or observation of internal quality assurance.

Training and competence: All review activity will be carried out by EQAs who have:

- a) appropriate competence
- b) been provided with appropriate training
- c) no conflict of interest in the outcome of the EQA activity.

Sampling: As an Awarding Organisation we must ensure that assessment of all components of a qualification are subject to quality assurance activity.

We must ensure that as an Awarding Organisation we review an appropriate sample of assessment by the centre. When agreeing what sample size is appropriate for the centre we must consider:

- a) any specific risks that relate to that centre, assessment or qualification
- b) the number of learners registered for the qualification at the centre
- c) the range of attainments demonstrated by those learners
- d) the number of Assessors at the centre involved in assessing the relevant criteria, and
- e) the number of persons involved in internal quality assurance in relation to assessment at the centre.

Risk – based approach: As an Awarding Organisation we must take a risk-based approach to sampling activity and must put in place arrangements which go beyond our minimum requirements where it is appropriate to do so, both as part of our obligation under Condition D3.1 of the Centre Assessment Standard Scrutiny (CASS) strategy to keep our approach under review and, under Conditions A6 and A7, in response to any particular risk identified or incident which has occurred.

Sampling Size and Guidance

EQAs will ensure that sampling is undertaken across each qualification selected for the planned review.

The current DCS status (if applicable) for each qualification, alongside the centre's annual monitoring review (AMR) risk rating will be considered to ensure an appropriate sample size is selected from each qualification.

To manage risk and support centres effectively, the following sampling rationale offers clarification of sampling required:

Selecting the sample size

5% of the learners registered per qualification or a minimum of 3 (whichever is the greater) will form the basis of the sample.

If a qualification is being sampled to maintain DCS, then a minimum of 1 learner sample is required.

If sampling a controlled assessment this will be 5% of learners booked onto the controlled assessment (or a minimum of 3).

The sampling of individual units will be rotated at each external quality assurance review to ensure a range of units are sampled over time.

When selecting the sample, the below information will be taken into consideration:

| High Risk | Medium Risk | Low Risk |
|--|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New centre first review • First time the centre has assessed a particular qualification • Previous grade 4/5 actions or high risk on AMR • Previous assessment graded C/D • Staffing issues* • Intelligence from third party e.g., whistle-blower/Ofqual • Centre hasn't achieved DCS for eligible qualifications (despite adequate learner numbers) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Previous actions grade 3 • Previous assessment graded B in section 5 • Key staffing personnel changes e.g., Lead IQA | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No actions or compliance sanctions for 2 consecutive reviews • No/minor changes to delivery team, well established and competent staff • Centre has DCS if eligible • Only recommendations on previous review • Previous assessment graded A |

| | | |
|--|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Known compliance issues/sanctions • Significant change in the number or profile of registrations for the qualifications • Known instances where the centre has issued incorrect results • High risk centre from AMR if relevant to sector/qualification | | |
|--|--|--|

*Staff issues could include COI not being appropriately managed, new staff on the team, staff competence.

The EQA will continuously risk assess throughout the review and as a result the sampling rationale for a centre may change as the review progresses where concerns arise.

Where a centre is deemed as low risk the sampling will incorporate the following:

- EQA will drive the full sample size for each qualification
- all IQAs (over time) will be reviewed
- all Assessors (over time) will be reviewed
- all/range of batches (wherever possible) will be reviewed (including all registration dates within batches if applicable)
- all satellite centres will be reviewed
- a range of assessed units within a qualification
- a range of assessment methods will be reviewed
- full range of awarded grades will be reviewed (where applicable and over time)
- a variety of completed and in progress portfolios including a mixture of those that have and haven't been internally quality assured (where applicable)
- if the centre has DCS the sample will include current learners and previous learners who've been certificated through DCS since the previous EQA review
- for qualifications which lead to a registered profession – EQAs will sample the square root of learners registered or a minimum of 5 learners (where there are fewer than 5 learners, all learners must be sampled).

Where a centre is deemed as medium risk the sampling will incorporate the above, plus the following:

- Widened sample based on areas of risk identified in previous report e.g., assessment practice, internal quality assurance practice, understanding of assessment criteria, assessment methods.

Where a centre is deemed as high risk sampling will incorporate the above, plus the following:

- If any issues are identified, broader sampling will continue to find out how widespread the issues are.

Based on the centre's risk rating, the EQA will ensure a robust sampling plan is created in line with the points above.

Duration of Review

The duration of the EQA review will be driven by the number of samples required. Sample size is defined by the sampling required to quality assure the assessment decision for each learner. This may include for example, a unit, an assessment method, a learning outcome.

| Number of samples required | Length of EQA review |
|----------------------------|------------------------|
| Up to 10 | Half a day – 3.5 hours |
| Up to 20 | 1 day – 7.5 hours |
| Up to 30 | 1.5 days |
| Up to 40 | 2 days |
| Up to 50 | 2.5 days |
| Up to 60 | 3 days |
| Up to 70 | 3.5 days |
| Up to 80 | 4 days |
| Up to 90 | 4.5 days |
| Up to 100 | 5 days |

Not all reviews will fit into the guidance given, there will be exceptions. In these instances, the EQA will use professional judgement and outline their rationale within the EQA report.

Portfolio Status

To determine a learner portfolio of evidence as **FINAL**, a minimum of 80% of the required evidence (units, learning outcomes, assessments) must be completed. When making this decision the below factors will also be taken into consideration, given the **FINAL** status will allow certification and could permit DCS to be achieved and/or maintained:

- Number of units/learning outcomes/assessments
- Type of qual e.g., high risk / LtP
- Centre risk rating from AMR
- Any grades of 4 or 5 within the current or previous reports
- RoA graded C or D
- Staffing changes
- Significant actions
- Is centre on the EQA risk register?
- Any intelligence from another AOs / Ofqual?

If the percentage of evidence is less than 80% then **MID-portfolio** will be selected.

If a portfolio selected for sample presents with minimal attainment at the time of sampling, then **NEW-portfolio** will be selected.

Additional information

Centres are not permitted to remove learners from the EQA sample. All learner evidence requested must be provided for the EQA review. Where a learner chosen for the sample has been withdrawn prior to the review, the centre must ensure that they are withdrawn on the NCFE Portal and notify their EQA. The EQA will then choose another learner to sample.

Should the requested samples not be available for the review, EQAs must grade the report criteria accordingly. EQAs must include in their report the action to be taken e.g., arrange an additional review to sample learners or withdraw learners who have left.

Should a sample be requested and not provided for a learner who has been certificated via DCS, the certificate may be revoked, and the centre could lose DCS.

Graded Qualifications – the centre must submit their grades on the Portal to allow the EQA to select a sample.

Customised Qualifications – follow the same sampling guidance as all other qualifications.

Conflicts of Interest (COI) – must be identified and discussed with the centre. If it is highlighted that centre staff are completing NCFE qualifications themselves for CPD, that fall into the sector being sampled, the EQA will widen to include a sample of these learners to ensure that the risk has been mitigated. The details of the centre staff with a potential COI and mitigations should be documented clearly within the EQA report.

Portfolio access for reviews – It is good practice for centres to provide full access to all learners (as per our Centre Agreement) prior to a review, including those learners that have completed since the last review that may have been certificated through DCS. This will enable the EQA, if needed, to widen the sample effectively.

Synoptic Project Additional Requirements – Model 4 VCerts

The following areas will be discussed and commented on during the centre review and reflected in the EQA report. This will be re-checked at each subsequent review to make sure nothing has changed.

| Areas to discuss and check | Where further guidance can be found in |
|----------------------------|--|
| Check Tracking Documents: | |

| | |
|---|--|
| <p>Check any tracking documents are accurate and up to date, which clearly evidences 21hrs has been timetabled for the controlled assessment.</p> | <p>Regulations for the Conduct of Synoptic Project</p> |
| <p>What model of delivery has the centre adopted and how has this been timetabled. Check that teaching and learning of unit 1 and unit 2 has taken place before learners access the synoptic project.</p> | <p>Qualification Specification Regulations for the Conduct of Synoptic Project (3.4)</p> |
| <p>Centre's secure storage of assessment materials:</p> | |
| <p>How has the centre maintained confidentiality of the assessment and stored any learner assessment records for the project?</p> <p>EQAs should check the booking report issued by NCFE and discuss any anomalies with the centre ensuring any cancelled learners have not had access to the Synoptic Project.</p> | <p>Regulations for the Conduct of Synoptic Project</p> |

Functional Skills Guidance

Sample from the Controlled Assessment Booking report

The EQA can only plan to sample those learners that have been booked and sat a controlled assessment. This sample will be drawn from the most recent Controlled Assessment Booking Report, sent to all EQAs each Monday.

Accepting Certificate Claims (no DCS in place)

Once sampling has taken place and if the centre does not have DCS, the EQA will be able to sign off all learners present on the booking report with a booking up to the day before the EQA review. This replaces batch sampling for Functional Skills only.

Speaking, Listening and Communication (SLC) Sampling

EQAs are required to observe one SLC assessment per Assessor per session per level. This can either be face to face or via an audio recorded file. Where issues are identified, the EQA may wish to sample further SLC recordings

Essential Digital Skills Qualifications (EDSQ) Additional Requirements

Sampling

If the assessment is new and the pass mark has not yet been awarded, the EQA will take a 100% sample of the completed assessments.

When the EQA is planning the sample, they will check the Controlled Assessment Booking Report, against the assessments in the Moderation window in Surpass and query any discrepancies.

- The centre must cancel unused bookings, or this will affect the 5% sampling calculation and DCS.
- Centres must ensure the assessments are made available to the EQA in Surpass – this can be achieved by the IQA pressing 'Release Results.' If the centre cannot see anything in their screen, the EQA should advise the centre to ensure the date filter has been taken off.

Sampling in Surpass

The EQA will select learners with a borderline score (scores at the pass mark, +1 or – 1). If there is inaccurate marking which could change the results of the assessment, the EQA will flag this for re-mark.

Banking and Rejecting Results in Quality Zone

If the marking is accurate, the result will be banked.

Any inaccurate marking that does not change the result will necessitate an action for the Assessor and IQA to ensure all future assessments are marked in line with the Mark Scheme. The EQA will then bank the result

If there are any inaccuracies that change the result from pass to fail or vice versa, the EQA will list the learner as 'Mid' in Section 5 and note which questions were incorrectly marked in Section 3. The EQA will 'Flag for Re Mark' in Surpass and 'Reject' the result in Quality Zone. The centre must re-mark flagged assessments before the result can be banked.

Banking Fail Results

The EQA can bank a fail result without carrying out an EQA review, so centres can book a re-sit as soon as the learner is ready.

Pre-Awarding / Awarding

During the awarding period, there may be an embargo of some results until a pass mark or pass mark range is set. Awarding will take place once there are sufficient assessments on which to base a decision. The results in Surpass are subject to change and are not the final results.

If the assessments are in the Pre-Awarding / Awarding process, the EQA must not bank them. The EQA will need to wait for final confirmation from NCFE that they are able to bank the results.

As part of Pre-Awarding, inaccuracies may be noted with assessments. The Pre-Awarding Subject Matter Expert will contact the centre directly and ask them to re-mark these and will flag them for re-mark in Surpass. The EQA will be copied into the email and will reject the results in Quality Zone.

Health, Childcare and Education Sector Guidance (CACHE)

Within this sector area there are a number of qualifications that need additional requirements, see below for this guidance:

Counselling Skills Qualifications Level 2 & Level 3:

The EQA will check whether the centre is delivering any counselling skills qualifications when they are sending the confirmation email and sampling plan to the centre. If so, the EQA will liaise with the LEQA to ensure an appropriate competent/qualified EQA is assigned to review learner portfolios.

The following **additional requirements** and high-risk elements have been highlighted and need consideration when completing any EQA reviews, sampling and investigations. Particular attention to sampling the centres IQA Strategy in relation to the following additional requirements is mandatory, as these will ensure a robust and risk-based approach:

Additional requirements:

Longitudinal Study:

Level 3 Diploma in Early Years Workforce (EYE) QRN: 601/2629/2

Level 3 Technical Diploma Early Years Education & Care (EYE) QRN: 601/8438/3

Level 3 Diploma Early Years Education & Care (EYE) QRN: 601/2147/6

Within the above qualifications (EYE) there is a longitudinal study which will be selected for sampling.

Level 4 and 5 Qualifications

The CACHE brand has a number of high-risk qualifications which sit at Level 4/5. Additional scrutiny will be implemented particularly focussing on those units which are linked to **research projects**.

Northern Ireland Qualifications

When the EQA plans to complete the review for the NCFE CACHE Level 3 Extended Diploma in Children's Care Learning and Development (Northern Ireland) – 603/7477/9, they must check and record in Section 4 in the EQA Report that learners have completed the NCFE CACHE Level 3 Diploma in Children's Care Learning and Development (Northern Ireland) – 603/6039/2 prior to signing off any certificate claims for this qualification.

The same principle applies to the following qualifications:

- NCFE CACHE Level 3 Extended Diploma in Health and Social Care (Adults) (Northern Ireland) – 603/5355/7
- NCFE Level 3 Diploma in Health and Social Care (Adults) (Northern Ireland) – 603/4724/7

Licence to Practise (LtP) Qualifications

Some of our qualifications are Licence to Practise (LtP) which need close scrutiny. Additional sampling and the occupational competency of staff maybe reviewed where assessment decisions are not in line with the Qualification Specification.

Dental and Pharmacy (Registered Professions) Qualifications

- NCFE CACHE Level 3 Diploma in the Principles and Practice for Pharmacy Technicians 603/5447/1
- NCFE CACHE Level 3 Diploma in the Principles and Practice of Dental Nursing 601/2251/1
- NCFE CACHE Level 3 Diploma in the Principles and Practice of Dental Nursing (INTEGRATED APPRENTICESHIP) 603/6671/0

NCFE use a robust EQA approach for the Dental and Pharmacy qualifications, with additional checks put in place to assure the regulators - General Dental Council (GDC) and the General Pharmaceutical Council (GPhC).

EQAs will sample 5% (or a minimum of 3 learners) of the learners registered and units will be sampled across each cohort of learners, or across the sample chosen if roll on, roll off, prior to certification.

Please see the User Guide to the External Quality Assurance Report which lists the additional requirements separately.

Additional Administrative Checks that need to be completed prior to certification for Dental/Pharmacy qualifications:

- centre Trackers and/or e-portfolio systems to ensure all learners presented for certification have completed 100% of the qualification
- all learner portfolios presented for certification have been agreed and signed off by the IQA
- the EQA will cross reference learner names on the claim with the additional checks carried out on previous EQA reviews
- should learners have been claimed for where additional checks have not been completed, the EQA will request further evidence that the learner(s) have completed 100% of the qualification and been agreed/signed off by the IQA. An additional EQA review will be required to sample learners that require certificating
- only once these checks have been carried out and confirmed can a certificate be signed off by the EQA

Sampling Scenarios

The EQA will request a sample of a minimum of 5% of the learner registrations or 3 learners per qualification, whichever is higher.

The EQA will cover a range of Assessors, IQAs and Units over time. This may mean that a sample contains more than 5% of learner registrations.

If the EQA does not agree with any of the assessment decisions made within the original sample, they may expand the sample.

If the sample is expanded, the EQA will explain their rationale within the assessment section of the External Quality Assurance report.

Examples

Approval Actions

- The centre has just had an Approval Review which highlighted that the staff do not hold the relevant occupational competence and therefore actions have been set for the EQA to follow up. A wider sample of the identified staff member's assessment decisions will be included within the sample to confirm that decisions have been made in line with the qualification specification.

Compliance issue

- The centre had a previous action related to invalid certificate claims. The centre had claimed for certificates without having sufficient learner evidence to support the claim. The EQA will widen the sample to include additional learners.

Centre Risk Status

- The centre has received a high-risk status from AMR. The risk rating of a centre may be used to inform an external quality assurance review and may be considered when an EQA selects the sample size they wish to review, if the risk rating is directly linked to the sector/qualification(s) being reviewed.

Version control

Only approved versions of this document should be documented in the below table:

| Version | Date | Revision author | Summary of changes |
|----------------|-------------|-----------------------------|---|
| V21 | 29/01/2021 | Rachael Lacey | Layout, RAG rating, duplicated information removed. |
| V22 | 22/11/2021 | Rachael Lacey | EDSQ and EERF pages updated. |
| V23 | 01/02/2022 | Louise Fisher | EDSQ and EERF pages updated. |
| V24 | 01/05/2022 | Louise Fisher | Remote Supervision |
| V25 | 15/08/2022 | Louise Fisher/Rachael Lacey | Customer facing tone of voice |