



Audit Report

Awarding body: Association of Accounting Technicians (AAT)
Date of audit: 31 May 2012

Note

Restricted or commercially sensitive information gathered during SQA Accreditation monitoring activities is treated in the strictest confidence. However:

- ◆ The findings of this report will be presented to SQA's Accreditation Committee and made available to colleagues from the Welsh Government, the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) and the Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation (Ofqual), with a view to the contents informing future accreditation and re-accreditation submissions by the awarding body.
- ◆ The report will be published on SQA Accreditation's website.

Please note that SQA Accreditation monitoring activity is conducted on a sampling basis. As a consequence, not all aspects of an awarding body's performance in quality assurance, contract compliance, implementation, awarding of certificates, and fee arrangements have been considered in this report to the same depth.

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Executive summary

Purpose and scope of audit

This was the 12th audit of AAT since it was approved as an awarding body by SQA Accreditation. The audit was designed to review, evaluate and document AAT's strategies, policies and procedures and ensure compliance with SQA Accreditation's *Awarding Body Criteria (2007)*.

As this was a full audit of AAT, all criteria were included within the scope of the audit.

Background

AAT was established as a professional body for Accounting Technicians in 1980 and currently has over 125,000 members. AAT was approved by SQA Accreditation as an awarding body during 1992. The awarding body operates globally in over 90 countries and has been SQA-accredited to offer a range of bookkeeping and accountancy qualifications for the financial sector.

Audit outcome

As a result of the audit and post-audit activities, one non-compliance has been recorded and two observations noted.

The one non-compliance and two observations form the AAT action plan: May 2012.

Awarding body feedback

The awarding body representative indicated that they were content with the manner in which the audit was carried out and with the audit outcome. The awarding body representative also commented that AAT was pleased with the information received from SQA Accreditation regarding the recent move to principle-based regulation and that the awarding body was clear on how to maintain compliance with SQA Accreditation's *Regulatory Principles (2011)*.

Audit summary

The following section details the non-compliance assigned and the observations noted against SQA Accreditation's *Awarding Body Criteria (2007)* through the course of the awarding body audit.

Key Goal 9: The awarding body has open and transparent procedures for complaints and appeals

Findings

Prior to the audit, AAT submitted a revised copy of the *AAT Code of Practice* (March 2012) for scrutiny. All AAT approved centres are required to comply with the criteria listed in this document. Under Section 15, which relates to complaints procedures, it is stated that 'all complaints/appeals procedures must include timescales and reference to students' right to complain/appeal to the appropriate regulator in the final instance'. This statement is incorrect, as students have the right to bring a complaint or appeal to SQA Accreditation at any point in time. SQA Accreditation encourages students and centres to exhaust the awarding body appeals process prior to taking any case to the qualification regulator however, should the nature of the complaint or appeal brought forward be deemed sufficiently serious, SQA Accreditation may intervene.

AAT also submitted a copy of a student guidance document entitled the *CBT (Computer Based Testing) Enquiries and Appeals Procedure (October 2011)*. The document provides details of each stage of the appeals process, however no reference is made to the right of any student to take their case to SQA Accreditation. Hence, the documentation submitted by AAT that included details of complaints and appeals processes did not consistently or appropriately reference the right of any student to take their complaint or appeal to SQA Accreditation (**non-compliance 1 refers**).

AAT must revise all documentation referencing complaints and appeals processes to include appropriate reference to the right of any student or centre to take their complaint or appeal to SQA Accreditation.

Conclusion

The evidence available confirms that AAT does not meet the requirements of the criteria under Key Goal 9. One non-compliance has been recorded and no observations noted.

Key Goal 13: The awarding body provides clear written guidance for awarding body representatives and prospective or approved centres and their staff

Findings

AAT has produced a wide range of guidance documentation for staff, approved centres and students — including those relating to centre approval and CBT. Across the range of documentation produced, there are several references to ‘*CBT*’, ‘*CBA*’ (Computer Based Assessment) and ‘*e-assessment*’ which all appear to be interchangeable. The terms ‘*training provider*’ and ‘*centre*’ also appear to be interchangeable across the range of guidance documentation available. The inconsistency of these references could lead to confusion, particularly for those who are unfamiliar with AAT processes and procedures (**observation 1 refers**).

AAT may wish to review the content of all guidance documentation for staff, approved centres and students to ensure the consistency of the terminology used with a view to avoiding any possible confusion.

Conclusion

The evidence available confirms that AAT continues to meet the requirements of the criteria under Key Goal 13. No non-compliances have been recorded and one observation was noted.

Key Goal 20: The awarding body’s systems and procedures for the appointment, training, registration, deployment and monitoring of external verifiers are effective and robust

Findings

AAT has produced a number of documents which make reference to the qualification requirements for Assessors and Verifiers involved in the delivery of SQA-accredited qualifications. For example, Section 3.2.2 of the *AAT Code of Practice (March 2012)* outlines the qualification requirements for Assessors in order that they may be considered competent in their role. However, no reference is made to the recently accredited Learning and Development Units which were intended as replacements for the existing Assessor (A1) and Verifier (V1) Units (**observation 2 refers**).

AAT may wish to revise all documents making reference to Assessor and Verifier qualification requirements to include reference to the recently accredited Learning and Development Units as appropriate qualifications.

Conclusion

The evidence available confirms that AAT continues to meet the requirements of the criteria under Key Goal 20. No non-compliances have been recorded and one observation was noted.

Conclusion

This was the 12th audit of AAT and the audit team was provided with full access to all relevant awarding body documentation.

Asides the non-compliance assigned, the Accreditation Auditors are satisfied that AAT has a range of robust policies and processes in place which appropriately support accredited qualification design and delivery. The Lead Accreditation Auditor would particularly like to highlight the document entitled *Your First 30 Days AAT Checklist* (a checklist for newly approved centres of all information required to successfully deliver AAT qualifications) as an area of good practice.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Current year non-compliances, observations and action plan

Non-compliances

A non-compliance will be recorded where the Lead Accreditation Auditor finds evidence that the awarding body fails to meet any of *Awarding Body Criteria (2007)* or any of the conditions attached to a qualification accredited by SQA Accreditation at the time of accreditation. When recording any non-compliance, the Lead Accreditation Auditor will agree the action to be taken by the awarding body and a timetable for resolving the issue.

Once agreed, the action plan is signed by representatives from both SQA Accreditation and the awarding body and will inform the agenda for the next scheduled audit.

Non-compliance recorded	Agreed action and date	Key Goal/criterion	Risk rating
1 The documentation submitted by AAT that included details of complaints and appeals processes did not consistently or appropriately reference the right of any student to take their complaint or appeal to SQA Accreditation.	AAT must revise all documentation referencing complaints and appeals processes to include appropriate reference to the right of any student or centre to take their complaint or appeal to SQA Accreditation. Evidence that this action has been carried out must be provided to SQA Accreditation by 31 August 2012 . Extention granted to 14 September 2012. Closed out 13 September 2012 .	Key Goal 9	2

Observations

An observation will be noted to ensure that any recommendations agreed during the audit are recorded for future reference. As observations are recorded for awarding body consideration only, it is not necessary to agree a timescale to resolve the observation in the awarding body action plan.

Observations noted	Action recommended	Key Goal/criterion
<p>1 AAT have produced a wide range of guidance documentation for staff, approved centres and students including those relating to centre approval and CBT. Across the range of documentation produced, there are several references to 'CBT', 'CBA' and 'e-assessment' which all appear to be interchangeable. The terms 'training provider' and 'centre' also appear to be interchangeable across the range of guidance documentation available.</p>	<p>AAT may wish to review the content of all guidance documentation for staff, approved centres and students to ensure the consistency of the terminology used with a view to avoiding any possible confusion.</p>	<p>Key Goal 13</p>
<p>2 AAT has produced a number of documents which make reference to the qualification requirements for Assessors and Verifiers involved in the delivery of SQA-accredited qualifications. However, no reference is made to the recently accredited Learning and Development Units which were intended as replacements for the existing Assessor (A1) and Verifier (V1) Units.</p>	<p>AAT may wish to revise all documents making reference to Assessor and Verifier qualification requirements to include reference to the recently accredited Learning and Development Units as appropriate qualifications.</p>	<p>Key Goal 20</p>

Appendix 2: Risk rating of non-compliances

SQA Accreditation assigns a risk rating to each non-compliance recorded as a result of an awarding body audit or through our centre monitoring activity. The table below illustrates how the rating for a non-compliance is assigned, and identifies the possible impact of the non-compliance on qualifications and/or the learner.

The assignment of a risk rating allows an awarding body to target their resources to areas that have been identified as having a major impact. The risk rating also allows SQA Accreditation to target its resources to support awarding bodies in improving their performance.

Rating	Risk	Impact of non-compliance
1	Very low	The non-compliance is likely to cause minimal concern and would not threaten the integrity of the qualification or impact adversely on the learner. Any overall effect is likely to be small scale and/or localised, rather than widespread. The issue identified is unlikely to recur once resolved and no long lasting damage would be anticipated.
2	Low	The non-compliance is of low impact but of sufficient importance to merit intervention, with a low threat to the systems or procedures associated with the qualification and/or impact on the learner. Disruption may not just be localised but more widespread and would possibly cause residual damage; however, this could be easily corrected without further consequence.
3	Medium	The non-compliance could potentially damage the credibility of the qualification and/or be detrimental to the learner. There may be some impact to the systems or procedures that support the qualification or the operational effectiveness of the awarding body.
4	High	The non-compliance could have a high impact on the integrity and reliability of the qualification or the effective operation of the awarding body as a whole if corrective action is not quickly taken. There is a high probability that the qualification and/or learner will be negatively affected.
5	Very high	The non-compliance will have a serious impact on the integrity and reliability of the qualification or the effective operation of the awarding body if corrective action is not immediately taken. There is a very high probability that the qualification and/or learner will be negatively affected.

In assigning a risk rating, each non-compliance is considered on its own merit, taking account of the context in which it was identified.

Appendix 3: Table of awards

Accredited qualifications currently offered

Award title	Level	Code	Accreditation date	Re-accreditation date
AAT Award in Bookkeeping	SCQF Level 5	R036 04	28/01/2009	31/07/2012
Certificate in Accounting	SCQF Level 5	R077 04	02/06/2010	31/12/2012
Diploma in Accounting	SCQF Level 6	R078 04	02/06/2010	31/12/2013
Diploma in Accounting	SCQF Level 8	R079 04	02/06/2010	31/12/2013
AAT Award in Accounting	n/a	R132 04	01/08/2011	31/07/2014

Appendix 4: Outstanding approval and accreditation conditions

A condition will be recorded at the time of approval of the awarding body or at the time of accreditation for an SQA-accredited qualification. A condition is recorded when SQA's Accreditation Co-ordination Group finds evidence that the awarding body does not fully meet *SQA Accreditation's Awarding Body Criteria (2007)*.

Condition	Agreed action and date	Key Goal/criterion
1 n/a		

Appendix 5: List of documents reviewed pre-audit and post-audit

Document title	Date of issue	Version number	Comments
FSSC Accountancy and Finance Assessment Strategy			
A Guide to General Documents			
Best Practice Handbook for the Writing and Quality Assurance of Assessment Content	May 2012	Version 7	
Self-assessment Reporting	March 2012		
Guidance on the Application of Reasonable Adjustments and Special Consideration in AAT Assessments	June 2010		
Internal Support			Flow chart
Post-launch Product Evaluation (Tracking)			
Supervisor/Invigilator Instruction for Computer Based Projects	Nov 2010		
Terms and Conditions			For the use of LearnPlus
AAT SecureAccess Centre User Guide		Version 1.0	
Computer Based Tests			Regulations
Enquiries and Appeals Procedure – Guidance Notes			
CBT Enquiries and Appeals Procedure	October 2011		
AAT SecureClient Install Guide and System Test		Version 1.1	
AAT Computer Based Assessments – March 2011 Update			
SecureAccess – Computer Based Tests for AAT			
AAT Code of Practice	March 2012		
AAT LearnPlus e-portfolio Student Guide			

Document title	Date of issue	Version number	Comments
Education and Training Monitoring Panel – Meeting Minutes	25 January 2012		
Learning and Development Board – Meeting Minutes	20 October 2011		
Process for the Monitoring and Review of Assessment and Learners' Performances			
AAT LearnPlus e-portfolio – Generating Evidence			
Mapping Sheet			Example
System Development Process			Flow chart
Sample Certificates			
Sample Replacement Certificates			
Monthly Certificate Compiling			Staff guidance
Duplicate Certificate Printing			Staff guidance
Diversity and Equality Policy and Procedures		vs 2	
Cases of Possible Student Member Malpractice	26 January 2011		Paper for Education and Training Monitoring Panel
Malpractice/Maladministration			Policy document
Table of Sanctions	25 January 2012		
Data Protection Policy			
Deletion and Retention Policy Guidelines			
AAT Procedure for the Development and Ongoing Review of Qualifications		vs 1	
AAT (ABC) Bookkeeping Qualification			Letter to centres
Qualification Activity for the Next 12 Months			
Your First 30 Days AAT Checklist			Centre checklist

Document title	Date of issue	Version number	Comments
AAT Divisional and Team Structure			
Learning and Development Board – Terms of Reference			
Relationship of the Board and Panels to the Council			Flow chart and description
AAT Conflict of Interest Policy	September 2011	Version 2	
AAT Chief External Verifier Agreement			
Workshop and Training Days – List			
Workshop and Training Day Agenda			
AAT Scotland Network Meeting – 15 November 2011			Presentation
Scotland Network Meeting – Minutes – 15 November 2011			
Scottish Network			Presentation
LearnPlus Assessments	27 July 2011		Paper for Education and Training Monitoring Panel
External Verification Report	2009	Version 2	
AAT Business Plan 2011–13			
Learning and Development Policy			
Learning and Development Board – KPI Paper	09 February 2012		
AAT Strategy 2011			
Self-assessment Action Plan 2010			
Self-assessment Action Plan 2011			
AAT Member Survey Research Report	15 September 2011		
Investors in People – Review Report	09 December 2010		
Internal Audit			Purpose and methodology
The AAT Way Team			Info sheet

Document title	Date of issue	Version number	Comments
Contact Centre Procedures Manual			Staff guidance
Direct Debit Procedures Manual			Staff guidance
Finance Queries Procedures Manual			Staff guidance
Logging Forms Procedures Manual			Staff guidance
Registrations Procedures Manual			Staff guidance
Student Services Printing Procedures Manual			Staff guidance
CPD for Tutors Seminars 2012			List of dates
Summing Up	March 2012		e-bulletin
External Verification Report – Aberdeen College – 3 June 2011			
External Verification Report – Carnegie College – 17 June 2011			
External Verification Report – City of Glasgow College – 17 April 2012			
External Verification Report – Dundee College – 27 May 2011			
External Verification Report – Kaplan Financial Glasgow – 1 March 2011			
External Verification Report – James Watt College – 28 February 2012			
External Verification Report – Microcom Training Limited – 28 July 2011			
External Verification Report – Orkney College – 21 April 2011			
External Verification Report – Stevenson College – 14 January 2011			
External Verification Report – Stevenson College – 23 May 2011			
External Verification Report – Stevenson College – 27 October 2011			

Document title	Date of issue	Version number	Comments
Application to Offer AAT Award in Bookkeeping	2011		
Application for Centre Approval	2010		
Centre Approval Process 2012			
Concept Database Screenshot			
SQA Centre Details			Approved centre list
Approved Fees 2011–12			
Enquiries and Appeals Procedure	27 July 2011		Paper for Education and Training Monitoring Panel
Customer Charter			
Quality Assurance Activity Report	April 2012		
Complaints Appeals Procedure Letter	November 2011		Letter to approved centres
Copy of New Computer Based Assessment Enquiry List			
NVQ/SVQ Assessment and Administration Manual 2009/2010			
Assessment and Administration Manual 2009/2010 – Diploma Pathway			
Self-assessment Guidance			For approved centres

Appendix 6: Signatures of agreement to action plan

For and on behalf of AAT

For and on behalf of SQA Accreditation

Signature

Signature

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Designation

Designation

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Date

Date

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