

Awarding body self-assessment

Guidance for evaluating and improving performance



Qualifications and
Curriculum Authority



Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru
Welsh Assembly Government



Rewarding Learning

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QUALIFICATIONS
AUTHORITY



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First published in 2006

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ISBN 1-85838-832-5

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Printed in Great Britain.

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Introduction	2
1. Corporate governance	4
2. Resources and expertise to secure the delivery of qualifications	5
3. Plan of provision	6
4. Content and design of qualifications	7
5. Content and design of assessment	8
6. Application of assessment methods	9
7. Determination and reporting of results	10
8. Registration, certification and malpractice	11
9. Equality and fair assessment	12
10. Customer service	13
11. Enquiries and appeals	14
Appendix: Other relevant publications	15

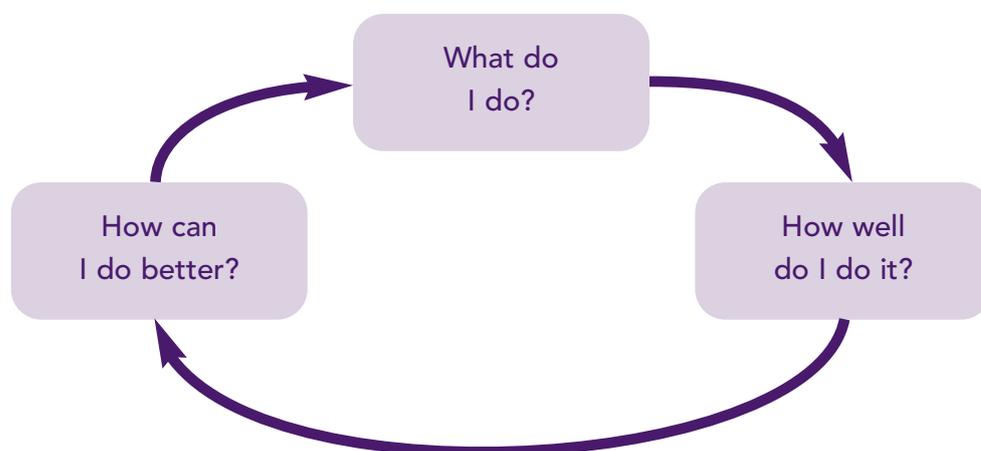
Introduction

The public need to be confident that awarding bodies' qualifications are of a high quality and fit for purpose, and that the delivery of these qualifications is monitored and maintained to a consistently high standard.

The regulatory authorities in England (QCA), Wales (DELLS¹), Northern Ireland (CCEA) and Scotland (SQA) are moving towards a more strategic approach to regulation, guided by the government's five principles for better regulation, which stipulate that it should be proportionate, accountable, consistent, transparent and targeted.

Awarding bodies and self-assessment

Awarding bodies are in the best position to recognise their own business needs and develop systems and procedures that are fit for purpose. They should use self-assessment to evaluate their own quality development and to support continuous improvement of their operations. This process can be illustrated with the following simple model.



Awarding bodies should include self-assessment in the normal cycle of review and evaluation of their operations, which should involve a comprehensive, systematic review of their activities and performance. They should use self-assessment to assure high quality and standards of their qualifications, and to monitor compliance with the regulatory authorities' criteria. Self-assessment is not the same as an annual report.

¹ The newly formed Department for Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills (DELLS) is a department within the Welsh Assembly Government. It incorporates the functions of ACCAC, a former Assembly-sponsored public body.

Regulatory authorities will use self-assessment as a starting point for monitoring. They will evaluate self-assessment information, allowing resources and attention to be focused on awarding bodies whose need for improvement is greater.

About this guidance

This guidance is for awarding bodies. It provides information on the areas that should be addressed as part of self-assessment. It explains what evidence to collect and how to evaluate its strengths and weaknesses and adopt a strategy to deal with any short comings.

This guidance applies to all accredited qualifications. In the context of most Scottish SVQs and NVQs, the guidance on independent or external assessment is not applicable. Awarding bodies should disregard the areas that do not apply to the qualifications they offer.

Information about procedural issues, including how often and in what format awarding bodies should report the outcomes of self-assessment to the regulatory authorities, will be provided separately.

Using this guidance

As part of self-assessment, awarding bodies will need to:

- a. make sure they consider all statements, questions and areas for self-assessment outlined in the following pages
- b. gather the necessary evidence base, which should include:
 - management tools such as risk registers, internal and external audits
 - reports such as annual reports to a governing body or the public
 - performance against targets
 - performance trends and benchmarking information
 - feedback from centres and/or candidates
 - the last monitoring or self-assessment report
 - outcomes from quality assurance monitoring, for example regulatory monitoring reports.

Once the evidence in relation to the statement and key areas of the criteria has been assembled, the awarding body can determine:

- the strengths and weaknesses of its arrangements
- actions to be taken to address any weaknesses, including target dates and the person(s) responsible.

Section 1: Corporate governance

Statement

- 1.1 An awarding body must have corporate governance arrangements that are fit for purpose. The arrangements should include robust and transparent governance, organisation and management.

Question

- 1.2 How do you evaluate whether your corporate governance arrangements are fit for the purpose of maintaining and securing the quality and standards of all qualifications you offer?

Areas for self-assessment

- 1.3 To determine whether the arrangements for corporate governance are effective, consider the extent to which you are/are not able to provide evidence to demonstrate that:
- the organisational structure and lines of accountability are clearly defined and fully understood by staff
 - clear direction is given through strategic objectives and targets that are fully understood by staff, including subcontractors and centres
 - where the awarding body is part of a consortium, standards setting body or training provider, the responsibilities of each member organisation are clearly understood and effectively put into practice
 - the distinction between the awarding body function and other functions within or across organisations is clear and any conflicts of interest are managed such that they do not constitute a barrier to access or a restrictive practice
 - any franchised or licensed organisation offering the awarding body's qualifications complies with the regulatory criteria
 - information, including in relation to fees and the authentication of accredited qualifications, is provided to the regulatory authorities.

Reference: *The statutory regulation of external qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (2004)*, paragraphs 5–7; *SVQ criteria and guidance for awarding bodies (1999)*, 'Awarding body organisation', 3.1–3.5.5

Section 2: Resources and expertise to secure the delivery of qualifications

Statement

- 2.1 The awarding body must deploy sufficient financial, technical and staffing resources to secure the delivery of the range of qualifications offered for the life of the qualifications.

Questions

- 2.2 How do you evaluate whether you have the right levels of staff who are effective in delivering service and improving quality of service?
- 2.3 How do you evaluate whether your examiners, moderators, independent assessors and external verifiers have the skills and knowledge needed to meet their responsibilities in relation to the delivery of qualifications and the maintenance of standards of assessment?

Areas for self-assessment

- 2.4 To determine whether you deploy sufficient resources to protect the interests of candidates, consider the extent to which you can/cannot provide evidence to demonstrate that:
- the human and physical resources you deploy are appropriate and sufficient to make sure you can carry out your functions
 - staff professional development and appraisal or review are effective in improving the quality of provision
 - the knowledge, understanding and skills/competence requirements of assessors, moderators and external verifiers are defined and appropriate to their responsibilities
 - arrangements are in place to appoint assessors, moderators and external verifiers who have the relevant skills and knowledge
 - you provide information, guidance and, where appropriate, training to enable assessors, moderators and external verifiers to meet their responsibilities in relation to standards and assessment.

Reference: *The statutory regulation of external qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (2004)*, paragraphs 8, 10; *SVQ criteria and guidance for awarding bodies (1999)*, 'Awarding body organisation', 3.2, 'Quality assurance', 3.7.3–5, 3.10

Section 3: Plan of provision

Statement

- 3.1 The awarding body must make sure there is a clear rationale for the qualifications it offers, and that these qualifications meet the needs of users.

Questions

- 3.2 How do you evaluate whether the qualifications you offer meet the needs of users without leading to excessive provision in the relevant sector/subject?
- 3.3 How do you evaluate whether the timetable for the proposed withdrawal of a qualification does not disadvantage candidates?

Areas for self-assessment

- 3.4 To determine whether the qualifications provision of the awarding body makes sure the needs of users are met, consider the extent to which you can/cannot provide evidence to demonstrate that:
- proposals for new qualifications or amendments to existing qualifications are substantiated with evidence of the anticipated demand for the qualification and of user needs
 - provision is reviewed on a regular basis against targets agreed with the regulatory authorities, taking into account take-up of existing qualifications and anticipating future market needs
 - the qualification development process includes market research that identifies gaps in provision and the needs of education, industry and candidates
 - marketing plans make sure predicted take-up of new qualifications is met and, where targets are not met, that appropriate action is taken
 - if an accredited qualification is withdrawn, or there is an intention to withdraw it:
 - sufficient notice of withdrawal is given to the regulatory authorities to make sure adequate national provision is maintained
 - centres are informed and the interests of candidates are protected
 - there is a contribution to national initiatives to improve the consistency, manageability and public understanding of provision.

Reference: *The statutory regulation of external qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (2004)*, paragraphs 1–4, 43, 44; *SVQ criteria and guidance for awarding bodies (1999)*, 'SVQ design and support', 2.1.2–2.1.5, 'Awarding body organisation', 3.5–3.5.5

Section 4: Content and design of qualifications

Statement

- 4.1 The awarding body must make sure the title, size and content of its qualifications and the associated guidance materials are clear to users.

Question

- 4.2 How do you evaluate whether the title, size and content of your qualifications and the associated guidance materials are clear to users?

Areas for self-assessment

- 4.3 To determine whether the arrangements for the development of the content of qualifications are effective, consider the extent to which you are/are not able to provide evidence to demonstrate that:
- the process for developing qualifications and considering appropriate content and assessment strategies involves stakeholders, including end users
 - when deciding the title, size and content of new qualifications, consideration is given to other accredited qualifications
 - draft assessment materials are trialled to make sure the end product meets the needs of users in terms of the size, content and manageability of the qualification
 - quality assurance procedures are followed for all new qualifications to make sure final specifications, assessment materials and guidance materials are clear and easily understood by end users.

Reference: *The statutory regulation of external qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (2004), paragraphs 45–52; *SVQ criteria and guidance for awarding bodies* (1999), 'SVQ design and support', 2.1.2–4, 'Assessment', 2.4–6, 'Quality assurance mechanisms', 2.8–2.8.2, 'Quality assurance', 3.10

Section 5: Content and design of assessment

Statement

- 5.1 Assessment methods chosen for a unit and/or qualifications must be fit for purpose.

Question

- 5.2 How do you evaluate whether the assessment methodology of the qualifications is fit for purpose and not too burdensome or costly for centres?

Areas for self-assessment

- 5.3 To determine whether the design of assessment is fit for purpose and meets the needs of users, consider the extent to which you can/cannot provide evidence to demonstrate that:
- consideration is given to appropriate forms of independent assessment, taking into account the qualification content, stated outcomes, equipment and material needs and costs
 - assessment materials are reviewed and action taken to make sure they are presented in clear and unambiguous language and differentiate only on the basis of a candidate's skills, knowledge and understanding
 - assessment materials are reviewed and action taken to make sure they are free from any overt or covert discrimination against any individuals or groups in terms of their wording or content
 - where appropriate, alternative routes or methods of assessment are checked to make sure the level of demand is comparable
 - the awarding body defines how independent/external assessments are to be carried out.

Reference: *The statutory regulation of external qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (2004), paragraphs 53–55; *SVQ criteria and guidance for awarding bodies* (1999), 'SVQ design and support', 2.1.5, 'Assessment', 2.4–2.6, 'Quality assurance mechanisms', 2.8–2.8.2

Section 6: Application of assessment methods

Statement

- 6.1 Assessment methods should be applied in a robust manner to make sure the results provide reliable measures of candidates' achievements.

Questions

- 6.2 How do you evaluate whether assessment of your qualifications is reliable?
- 6.3 How do you make sure assessments are consistent within and across centres as well as between assessors, moderators and external verifiers?
- 6.4 How do you evaluate whether your assessment approaches are valid?

Areas for self-assessment

- 6.5 To determine whether the application of assessment methods makes sure results provide valid and reliable measures of candidates' achievements, consider the extent to which you can/cannot provide evidence to demonstrate that:
- the evidence provided by candidates is relevant, authentic and sufficient to determine whether it meets the required standard
 - the procedures for standardising independent assessment, including external assessment, are effective
 - you take appropriate steps to make sure internal assessment is carried out in the same way across centres
 - the arrangements you have in place enable internal assessors to meet their responsibilities
 - you make sure internal assessment is moderated or verified
 - you make sure assessment standards are maintained over time
 - you take prompt and decisive action where monitoring of centres reveals critical weaknesses in processes or procedures
 - you take prompt and decisive action where monitoring of the work of examiners, moderators, independent assessors and external verifiers reveals any risk to maintaining quality and standards
 - you use plain language that is free from bias and appropriate to the qualification
 - where relevant, you comply with the language requirements set out in paragraphs 39–41 of the regulatory criteria
 - where relevant, you make sure adequate mechanisms are in place to guarantee the consistency of moderation/verification decisions across the languages of English, Welsh and Irish (Gaeilge).

Reference: *The statutory regulation of external qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (2004), paragraphs 13, 35–42, 56–62; *SVQ criteria and guidance for awarding bodies* (1999), 'Assessment', 2.7, 3.6, 'Quality assurance', 3.7.3–5, 3.7.7

Section 7: Determination and reporting of results

Statement

- 7.1 The processes by which awarding bodies use information to determine individual candidates' results need to be sufficiently robust for candidates and other users to be able to interpret results with confidence.

Questions

- 7.2 How do you evaluate whether assessments are accurate and consistent and aggregation and grading practices are consistent?
- 7.3 How do you make sure standards are maintained year on year?

Areas for self-assessment

- 7.4 To evaluate whether the arrangements for the determination and reporting of results are effective, consider the extent to which you are/are not able to provide evidence to demonstrate that:
- all interested parties are aware of the basis on which judgements are made
 - awarding decisions are taken by awarding personnel who are expert in the area being assessed and fully conversant with the required standards
 - comprehensive records of decisions are kept
 - awarding decisions are based on a sufficiently large sample of candidates' work
 - standards are comparable from year to year and across centres and specifications with the same title
 - steps are taken to ensure compliance with the codes of practice and minimise errors
 - awards are reviewed and, where errors are identified, assessment results are adjusted
 - information provided to centres on how the overall award is derived from candidate performance, including how elements of assessment are combined as part of that process, is accessible
 - for graded qualifications, information provided to centres to enable them to interpret the standard required at each grade is clear.

Reference: *The statutory regulation of external qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (2004)*, paragraphs 63–67; *SVQ criteria and guidance for awarding bodies (1999)*, 'Assessment', 2.5–2.5.6, 3.6, 'Quality assurance', 3.7.2–5, 3.10

Section 8: Registration, certification and malpractice

Statement

- 8.1 The awarding body must make sure all candidates receive valid and timely results and that malpractice is detected and acted upon.

Questions

- 8.2 How do you evaluate whether candidates receive appropriate assessments, timely and valid results and correct certificates?
- 8.3 How do you make sure centres have sufficient resources to carry out assessments?
- 8.4 For qualifications accredited by QCA, DELLS and CCEA, how do you make sure assessments taken outside of England, Wales or Northern Ireland are consistent with those taken within England, Wales or Northern Ireland?
- 8.5 How do you evaluate whether your systems to detect and deal with malpractice are effective?

Areas for self-assessment

- 8.6 To determine whether the arrangements for registration, certification and malpractice are effective, consider the extent to which you are/are not able to provide evidence to demonstrate that:
- the centre approval process operates effectively
 - your systems make sure candidates who complete the requirements for an award promptly receive a certificate in the required format, as agreed with the regulatory authorities and within the agreed timeframe
 - procedures to authenticate claims for replacement certificates and, where appropriate, to issue replacement certificates (explicitly labelled as such) are adequate
 - your safeguards against fraudulent or mistaken claims for certification, including procedures for dealing with malpractice on the part of candidates, centre staff or others involved in providing qualifications, are fit for purpose
 - you promptly and consistently inform regulatory authorities whenever there is evidence that certificates might be invalid and agree upon appropriate remedial action
 - you collate data about centres, candidates and qualifications for central monitoring purposes and are able to supply the regulatory authorities with such data on request
 - for qualifications accredited by QCA, DELLS and CCEA, assessments taken outside of England, Wales or Northern Ireland are consistent with those taken within England, Wales or Northern Ireland.

Reference: *The statutory regulation of external qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (2004), paragraphs 11, 12, 21, 22, 28–31; *SVQ criteria and guidance for awarding bodies* (1999), 'Quality assurance', 3.7.2–3, 3.7.5, 3.10, 'SVQ management systems', 3.12–3.12.3, 3.15–3.15.2

Section 9: Equality and fair assessment

Statement

- 9.1 The awarding body must make sure outcomes are equitable for all candidates.

Questions

- 9.2 How do you evaluate whether outcomes are equitable for all candidates?
- 9.3 How do you make sure eligible candidates have access to reasonable adjustments and/or special consideration and assessments in more than one language are comparable?

Areas for self-assessment

- 9.4 To determine whether arrangements to make sure outcomes are equitable for all candidates are effective, consider the extent to which you are/are not able to provide evidence to demonstrate that:
- your arrangements to monitor access to assessment and make sure your assessment mechanisms do not create barriers to access or achievement for candidates are fit for purpose
 - the information provided for centres and candidates is relevant and identifies clearly when reasonable adjustments and/or special consideration are appropriate
 - reasonable adjustments preserve the validity, reliability and integrity of the assessment and certificates accurately reflect candidate achievement
 - the use of reasonable adjustments and special consideration is monitored, evaluated and reported on annually.

Reference: *The statutory regulation of external qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (2004), paragraphs 9, 14–20; *SVQ criteria and guidance for awarding bodies* (1999), 'Quality assurance', 3.9

Section 10: Customer service

Statement

10.1 The awarding body must publish a customer service statement and monitor its performance against customer service targets.

Questions

10.2 How do you evaluate whether your customer service performance meets the needs of centres?

10.3 How do you measure your performance against your customer service targets?

Areas for self-assessment

10.4 To determine whether the service you provide to centres is effective, consider the extent to which you are/are not able to provide evidence to demonstrate that:

- a. the quality of service customers can expect in relation to qualifications provision, information and guidance is clearly specified
- b. challenging and realistic targets relating to customer service targets are set and met and effective monitoring procedures are in place
- c. there are opportunities for centres to contribute to the evaluation of customer service targets
- d. sufficient information is provided to centres to identify appropriate points of contact and communication channels
- e. procedures ensure complaints are addressed impartially and within a specified timeframe
- f. administrative obligations for centres are as clear and streamlined as possible and centres understand and carry out their administrative obligations
- g. information provided to centres and candidates relating to fee structures, costs and resources associated with a qualification is clear and comprehensive
- h. communication with the candidate and/or centre throughout the process is effective, including written acknowledgements that specify timeframes for dealing with complaints and records of the outcomes
- i. fee structures are appropriate and unlikely to deter potential candidates from registering for the qualification or units.

Reference: *The statutory regulation of external qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (2004)*, paragraphs 32, 33(b); *SVQ criteria and guidance for awarding bodies (1999)*, 'Quality assurance', 3.7.1, 3.7.7, 3.8, 3.10

Section 11: Enquiries and appeals

Statement

11.1 The awarding body must publish procedures that centres or candidates can follow to enquire or appeal to the awarding body against assessment or other decisions.

Question

11.2 How do you evaluate whether your procedures for enquiries or appeals against assessment decisions are adequate?

Areas for self-assessment

- 11.3 To determine whether the service you provide to centres is effective, consider the extent to which you are/are not able to provide evidence to demonstrate that:
- information on the enquiry service enables centres to request a check on assessment decisions affecting candidates' results
 - the published information explains how an unresolved appeal can be put to independent review
 - procedures are consistent with codes of practice: include at least one independent member who is not and has not been a member of that awarding body's board or committees, or an employee or examiner at that awarding body, at any time during the past seven years; and are properly and fairly applied in arriving at judgements
 - the use of fees does not deter individual candidates or groups of candidates with reasonable grounds from submitting an appeal; and that a full refund is made when a result improves following an appeal or, in the case of a group appeal, a full refund or a proportion appropriate to the outcome is made
 - the outcomes from enquiries and appeals are used to evaluate the accuracy of results for other candidates in the same assessment and, where appropriate, steps are taken to protect the interests of all candidates and the integrity of the qualification
 - the outcomes of enquiries and appeals are used to monitor, evaluate and report at least annually on the operation of the enquiry service and appeals arrangements.

Reference: *The statutory regulation of external qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (2004)*, paragraphs 23–27; *SVO criteria and guidance for awarding bodies (1999)*, 'Quality assurance', 3.7.1, 3.8, 3.10

Appendix: Other relevant publications

The following publications can be downloaded from the QCA website (www.qca.org.uk):

- *Arrangements for monitoring and reporting publicly on external qualifications* (2000)
- *GCSE, GCE, VCE, GNVQ and AEA Code of practice 2006/7* (2006)
- *NVQ code of practice 2001* (2002)
- *The statutory regulation of external qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (2004)

The following publication can be downloaded from the SQA website (www.sqa.org.uk):

- *SVQ criteria and guidance for awarding bodies* (1999)

About this publication

Who's it for?

This booklet is for awarding bodies.

What's it about?

This booklet contains information on areas that should be addressed as part of self-assessment, including how to:

- collect evidence
- evaluate strengths and weaknesses
- adopt a strategy to deal with any short-comings identified.

What's it for?

This booklet should be used as a guide when considering self-assessment.

Related materials

Arrangements for monitoring and reporting publicly on external qualifications (2000)

SVQ criteria and guidance for awarding bodies (1999)

GCSE, GCE, VCE, GNVQ and AEA Code of practice 2006/7 (2006) (QCA/06/1677)

NVQ code of practice 2001 (2002) (QCA/02/875)

The statutory regulation of external qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (2004) (QCA/04/1293)

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QCA reference: QCA/06/2448

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