

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 including all satellite centres and centre sites as appropriate.

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

A minimum of 3 learners will be sampled per qualification. If a qualification exceeds 50 registrations this number may increase to ensure a sufficient sample is reviewed in line with sampling detail below.

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

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 such as whistle-blower / Ofqual • Centre has not achieved DCS for eligible qualifications (despite adequate learner numbers) • Known compliance issues/sanctions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Previous actions grade 3 • Previous assessment graded B in section 5 • Key staffing personnel changes such as Lead IQA 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No actions or compliance sanctions for two 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"> • 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 		
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*Staff issues could include conflicts of interest (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
- if delivered via distance and / or blended learning, a range of learners will be sampled based on UK / International locations
- a range of assessed units within a qualification
- a range of assessment methods will be reviewed (where applicable)
- 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 for example assessment practice, internal quality assurance practice, understanding of assessment criteria (AC), assessment methods.

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

Where issues are identified sampling will be expanded to inform a detailed review of areas of risk'

Based on the centre's risk rating, the EQA will ensure a robust sampling plan is created and documented 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. A sample may be defined as, for example – a unit or a learning outcome (LO):

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 this in 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 (LOs), assessments) must be completed. When making this decision the below factors will also be taken into consideration, given that the **FINAL** status will allow certification and could permit DCS to be achieved and / or maintained:

- Number of units / LOs / assessments
- Type of qual / high-risk / Licence to Practise (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 for example, 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 – 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.

Generic Sampling examples

A minimum of 3 learners will be sampled per qualification, if the qualification holds DCS it will be 1. If a qualification exceeds 50 registrations this number may increase to ensure a sufficient sample is reviewed in line with sampling detail below.

The EQA will cover a range of assessors, IQAs and Units over time.

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/qualifications being reviewed.

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:	
Check any tracking documents are accurate and up to date, which clearly evidences allocated hours have been timetabled for the controlled assessment.	Regulations for the Conduct of Synoptic Project
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.	Qualification Specification Regulations for the Conduct of Synoptic Project (3.4)
Centre's secure storage of assessment materials:	
<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>The date that the controlled was booked also shows in Quality Zone which will be reviewed.</p>	Regulations for the Conduct of Synoptic Project

Functional Skills Guidance

Controlled Assessments: Reading, Writing and Maths

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 for Reading, Writing and maths. 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 with a controlled assessment booking date up to the day before the EQA review.

Internal Assessments: Speaking, Listening and Communicating (SLC)

Sample from the Assessment Tracking Document (ATD)

EQAs will plan a sample from the ATD, which must be provided for review.

EQAs will need to quality assure the tasks set for learners at all levels, and details must be provided by centres for review.

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.

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 who were registered up to the day before the EQA review.

Essential Digital Skills Qualifications (EDSQ) Additional Requirements

EDSQ Sampling

The EQA will sample assessments in Surpass. The centre must 'Release Results' so that the EQA can view them. If the assessments are not visible, the 'Date Filter' may need to be removed.

Pre-Awarding

EDSQ assessments are released with no set pass mark. The pass mark is arrived at during Awarding. Pre-Awarding happens before Awarding and takes place to check accuracy of marking before Awarding.

Pre-Awarding takes place 6 weeks after paper release. At Pre-Awarding, the EQA team will sample 100% of available assessments.

- If assessments are correctly marked, they will be banked at this point, without an EQA review taking place.
- If assessments are not marked correctly, they will be flagged for re mark and results will be rejected.

EQAs will provide feedback to centres about marking adjustments, and these will need to be checked for accuracy before the result is banked.

- For inaccurate results out of the pass mark range, the EQA allocated to the centre will plan an EQA review to sample the assessments, within 3 months.
- For inaccurate results within the pass mark range, an EQA review will be planned as soon as the centre make new bookings, and the EQA will sample only the newly booked assessments.

Awarding

Once Awarding has taken place, banked results will be certificated.

Mop up Awarding – Embargoed Assessments

If a pass mark is not set, a pass mark range will be agreed. Any accurately marked assessments that fall into this range will be awarded, and this may delay results.

EQA Review

Once an assessment has been awarded, there will be a pass mark or pass mark range in place. This will be communicated to EQAs internally.

- Where there is a pass mark range, EQAs will need to sample 100% of assessments with results in the pass mark range.
- Where there is a final pass mark, EQAs will need to sample assessments with results at and around the pass mark.

If marking is accurate, the result will be banked. Where inaccuracies are identified, actions will be set for future assessment.

If marking inaccuracies have affected the outcome of the assessment, the assessment will be flagged for re mark and rejected. The corrected result will be banked once the EQA checks that the re mark is accurate.

Fail Results

The EQA can bank a fail result outside of an EQA review. This allows the centre to book a re sit as soon as the learner is ready.

Direct Claims Status

Where marking is found to be consistently inaccurate, DCS will be removed.

Health, Childcare and Education Sector Guidance (CACHE)

The **Assessment Principles** for the Health, Health and Social Care and Early Years sector must be adhered to in all centres delivering competence and work-based qualifications to the adult workforce in England.

These are included in the Support Handbook:

<https://www.ncfe.org.uk/media/coedrku4/support-handbook.pdf>

EQAs must ensure that where centres have used a '**Contracted Assessor**' to work directly with the centre, that the centre ensures they contribute to all aspects of standardisation. The EQA must ensure the centre has a process of training to follow which includes induction and quality assurance activities.

The EQA must check the following and record the findings in their report:

- Contract
- Induction procedure
- CPD
- Standardisation meeting minutes- attendance and themes
- Interview learner linked to the Contracted Assessor
- Interview the Contracted Assessor (at the EQAs discretion)
- Evidence completed by the Contracted Assessor (Eg: Observations, feedback)

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 3 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

License to Practise Qualifications

Some of our qualifications are 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 (Registered Professions) Qualifications

- 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) 610/1340/7

NCFE use a robust EQA approach for the Dental qualifications, with additional checks put in place to assure the regulator – General Dental Council (GDC).

A minimum of 3 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.

Throughout the session, the sampling of learners must include New, Mid and Final checks. This does not mean that every learner has to have three checks, as this relates to all learners within that cohort.

- All final portfolios, as stated below, must be checked and confirmed that they are 100% complete, including the 2 MCQs in the 601/2251/1 qualification. (This will be recorded in Section 5 of the EQA report).

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 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 completed learner names (confirmed by the centre) with previous EQA reports. Sampling may have taken place at a New or Mid-point, or just at this Final certification stage, where the 100% administration checks will be applied
- should learners have been claimed for where additional checks have not been completed, the EQA will request further evidence that the learners 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

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
V26	April 23	Rachael Lacey	Update to sampling of international learners
V27	October 23	Louise Fisher Juliet Meeres Rachael Lacey	Update to EDSQ section Update to Registered Professions- new dental qualification added and sample size reviewed. Sample size explanation reviewed
V28	March 24	Louise Fisher Juliet Meeres	Update to certificate release guidance for Speaking, Listening and Communicating EDSQ and SLC updates Assessment Principles guidance for the Health, Health and Social Care and Early Years sector added.