NCFE Active IQ Level 4 Certificate in Sports Massage Therapy
QN: 601/4929/2



Qualification Specification

Qualification summary

Qualification title	**NCFE Active IQ Level 4 Certificate in Sports Massage Therapy**
Ofqual qualification number (QN)	601/4929/2
Guided learning hours (GLH)	128
Total qualification time (TQT)	190
Credit value	19
Minimum age	16
Qualification purpose	This qualification is designed to provide learners with the knowledge and skills to treat and/or seek to correct common patterns of dysfunction and pre-diagnosed injuries.
Grading	Achieved/not yet achieved
Assessment method	Internally assessed and externally quality assured portfolio of evidence.
Work/industry placement experience	Work/industry placement experience is not required.
UCAS	Please refer to the UCAS website for further details of points allocation and the most up-to-date information.
Performance points	Please check the performance points data produced by the Department for Education (DfE) available online.
Regulation information	This is a regulated qualification. The regulated number for this qualification is 601/4929/2.
Funding	This qualification may be eligible for funding. For further guidance on funding, please contact your local funding provider.

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Section 1: introduction

Centres must ensure they are using the most recent version of the Qualification Specification on the website.

Aims and objectives

This qualification aims to:

- focus on the study of sports massage therapy
- provide learners with the knowledge and skills to treat and/or seek to correct common patterns of dysfunction and suitable pre-diagnosed injuries
- offer breadth and depth of study, incorporating a key core of knowledge
- provide opportunities to acquire a number of practical and technical skills.

Support Handbook

This Qualification Specification must be used alongside the mandatory Support Handbook, which can be found on the NCFE website. This contains additional supporting information to help with planning, delivery and assessment.

This Qualification Specification contains all the qualification-specific information you will need that is not covered in the Support Handbook.

Guidance for entry

This qualification is designed for those who wish to further their careers in sports massage with adults.

Registration is at the discretion of the centre in accordance with equality legislation and should be made on the NCFE Portal.

Learners wanting to undertake this qualification must hold a Level 3 Diploma in Sports Massage Therapy or equivalent. There is an element of communication involved (discussing, presenting, reading and writing) and learners should have basic skills in communication pitched at level 3. Performing sports massage is a physical activity and learners will need to be fit enough to carry this out.

Centres are responsible for ensuring that all learners are capable of achieving the learning outcomes (LOs) and complying with the relevant literacy, numeracy, and health and safety requirements.

Learners registered on this qualification should not undertake another qualification at the same level, or with the same/a similar title, as duplication of learning may affect funding eligibility.

Achieving this qualification

To be awarded this qualification, learners are required to successfully achieve **three units** (19 credits) from the mandatory units.

Please refer to the list of units in appendix A for further information.

To achieve this qualification, learners must successfully demonstrate their achievement of all LOs of the units as detailed in this Qualification Specification.

Progression

Learners who achieve this qualification could progress to the following:

- employment:
  - sports massage therapist
- further education:
  - further specialist training in sports massage
  - fitness instructing
- higher education.

Resource requirements

There are no mandatory resource requirements for this qualification, but centres must ensure learners have access to suitable resources to enable them to cover all the appropriate LOs.

Realistic work environment (RWE) requirement/recommendation

The assessment of competence-based criteria should ideally be conducted within the workplace. However, in instances where this is not feasible, learners can be assessed in a realistic work environment (RWE) designed to replicate real work settings.

It is essential for organisations utilising an RWE to ensure it accurately reflects current and authentic work environments. By doing so, employers can be confident that competence demonstrated by a learner in an RWE will be translated into successful performance in employment.

In establishing an RWE, the following factors should be considered.

The work situation being represented is relevant to the competence requirements being assessed:

- the work situation should closely resemble the relevant setting
- equipment and resources that replicate the work situation must be current and available for use to ensure that assessment requirements can be met
- time constraints, resource access and information availability should mirror real conditions.

The learner's work activities reflect those found in the work environment being represented, for example:

- interaction with colleagues and others should reflect expected communication approaches
- tasks performed must be completed to an acceptable timescale
- learners must be able to achieve a realistic volume of work as would be expected in the work situation being represented
- learners operate professionally with clear understanding of their work activities and responsibilities
- feedback from colleagues and others (for example, customers, service users) is maintained and acted upon
- account must be taken of any legislation, regulations or standard procedures that would be followed in the workplace.

How the qualification is assessed

Assessment is the process of measuring a learner's skill, knowledge and understanding against the standards set in a qualification.

This qualification is internally assessed and externally quality assured.

The assessment consists of **one** component:

- an internally assessed portfolio of evidence, which is assessed by centre staff and externally quality assured by NCFE (internal quality assurance must still be completed by the centre as usual).

Learners must be successful in this component to gain the Level 4 Certificate in Sports Massage Therapy.

Learners who are not successful can resubmit work within the registration period; however, a charge may apply in cases where additional external quality assurance visits are required.

Unless otherwise stated in this specification, all learners taking this qualification must be assessed in English and all assessment evidence presented for external quality assurance must be in English.

Internal assessment

Each learner must create a portfolio of evidence generated from appropriate assessment tasks to demonstrate achievement of all the LOs associated with each unit. On completion of each unit, learners must declare that the work produced is their own and the assessor must countersign this.

If a centre needs to create their own internal assessment tasks, there are four essential elements in the production of successful centre-based assessment tasks; these are:

- ensuring the assessment tasks are meaningful with clear, assessable outcomes
- appropriate coverage of the content, LOs or assessment criteria (AC)
- having a valid and engaging context or scenario
- including sufficient opportunities for stretch and challenge for higher attainers.

Section 2: unit content and assessment guidance

This section provides details of the structure and content of this qualification including grading, level, credit and guided learning hours (GLH).

The types of evidence listed are for guidance purposes only. Within learners' portfolios, other types of evidence are acceptable if all learning outcomes (LOs) are covered, and if the evidence generated can be internally and externally quality assured. For approval of methods of internal assessment other than portfolio building, please contact your external quality assurer (EQA).

Unit 01 Conducting subjective and objective assessment (D/506/7501)

Assessment				
Internally assessed and externally quality assured portfolio of evidence				
Mandatory	**Achieved/not yet achieved**	**Level 4**	**7 credits**	**47 GLH**

Learning outcomes (LOs) The learner will:	**Assessment criteria (AC)** The learner can:
1. Understand the anatomy and physiology of the major joints of the body	1.1 Identify bony structures associated with the major joints
	1.2 Explain the functions of bony structures associated with the major joints
	1.3 Identify soft tissue structures located at the major joints
	1.4 Explain the function of soft tissue structures located at the major joints
	1.5 Explain the different types of joint-end feel
2. Understand the influences and effects of client information on treatment planning	2.1 Explain factors which may predispose clients to injury and dysfunction
	2.2 Explain how factors may influence a client's ability to recover from injury
	2.3 Give examples of how subjective information may influence treatment planning
	2.4 Identify reasons for treatment deferral and referral
3. Understand the effects of anatomy, physiology and pathology on human function	3.1 Describe the characteristics of common postural types
	3.2 Explain the effects of postural deviations
	3.3 Describe the pathophysiology of common injuries/soft tissue dysfunction
	3.4 Explain how the ageing process affects the musculoskeletal systems
4. Understand the principles and practice of objective assessment techniques	4.1 Explain the methods and purpose for a range of objective assessment techniques • asymmetry • palpation • range of movement (active, passive, resisted) • postural analysis • functional tests • special tests.
	4.2 Explain how to interpret findings for each objective assessment technique
	4.3 Critically evaluate the range of objective assessment methods used to gather information
5. Be able to conduct subjective and objective assessment	5.1 Carry out subjective assessments of clients
	5.2 Obtain consent for objective assessments
	5.3 Carry out objective assessments of clients
	5.4 Record client information in accordance with professional practice requirements
	5.5 Store client information as legally required
6. Be able to devise a sport massage treatment plan	6.1 Devise a treatment plan
	6.2 Explain the rationale for chosen massage interventions
	6.3 Present massage interventions and rationale to clients
	6.4 Obtain consent for treatment

Unit 02 Provide sports massage techniques to prevent and manage injury (H/506/7502)

Assessment				
Internally assessed and externally quality assured portfolio of evidence				
Mandatory	**Achieved/not yet achieved**	**Level 4**	**9 credits**	**61 GLH**

Learning outcomes (LOs) The learner will:	**Assessment criteria (AC)** The learner can:
1. Understand the principles of soft tissue techniques used in sports massage	1.1 Describe a range of soft tissue techniques: • soft tissue release • connective tissue • corrective frictions (transverse) • trigger points • muscle energy.
	1.2 Explain the protocols to follow for each soft tissue technique: • soft tissue release • connective tissue • corrective frictions (transverse) • trigger points • muscle energy.
	1.3 Critically evaluate the effects of each soft tissue technique
2. Be able to apply soft tissue techniques in sports massage treatments	2.1 Prepare clients for soft tissue techniques
	2.2 Position clients for comfort, dignity and maximal effectiveness
	2.3 Demonstrate a range of soft tissue techniques
	2.4 Monitor tissue response throughout treatments
	2.5 Gain feedback from clients throughout treatments
	2.6 Adapt soft tissue techniques to meet the needs of clients
	2.7 Adapt own posture and position throughout application to ensure safe and effective application
	2.8 Evaluate the effectiveness of soft tissue techniques
	2.9 Adapt treatment plans based on evaluation of treatments
	2.10 Present aftercare advice to clients, providing opportunities for questions

Unit 03 Treatment modalities to support soft tissue repair (K/506/7503)

Assessment				
Internally assessed and externally quality assured portfolio of evidence				
Mandatory	**Achieved/not yet achieved**	**Level 4**	**3 credits**	**20 GLH**

Learning outcomes (LOs) The learner will:	**Assessment criteria (AC)** The learner can:
1. Understand treatments to support soft tissue repair	1.1 Explain the aims of treatments to support soft tissue repair during the acute stage of injury
	1.2 Describe treatment protocols to use with clients during the acute stage of injury
	1.3 Explain the aims of treatments to support soft tissue repair during the sub-acute stage of injury
	1.4 Explain which treatment options support the sub-acute stage of injury
	1.5 Explain the aims of treatments to support soft tissue repair during the chronic stage of injury
	1.6 Explain which treatment options support the chronic stage of injury
2. Understand the use of cryotherapy during soft tissue repair	2.1 Explain the physiological and neurological effects of using ice during soft tissue repair
	2.2 Describe methods of applying cryotherapy during soft tissue repair
	2.3 Identify contraindications to cryotherapy
	2.4 Describe adverse reactions to cryotherapy
	2.5 Explain actions to take in the event of an adverse reaction
3. Understand the use of heat treatments during soft tissue repair	3.1 Explain the physiological and neurological effects of using heat during soft tissue repair
	3.2 Describe methods of applying heat during the soft tissue repair process
	3.3 Identify contraindications to heat treatments
	3.4 Describe adverse reactions to heat treatments
	3.5 Explain actions to take in the event of an adverse reaction

NCFE assessment strategy

The key requirements of the assessment strategies or principles that relate to units in this qualification are summarised below.

The centre must ensure that individuals undertaking assessor or quality assurer roles within the centre conform to the assessment requirements for the unit they are assessing or quality assuring.

Knowledge LOs

- assessors will need to be both occupationally knowledgeable and qualified to make assessment decisions
- internal quality assurers (IQAs) will need to be both occupationally knowledgeable and qualified to make quality assurance decisions.

Competence/skills LOs

- assessors will need to be both occupationally competent and qualified to make assessment decisions
- IQAs will need to be both occupationally knowledgeable and qualified to make quality assurance decisions.

The centre with whom the learners are registered will be responsible for making all assessment decisions. Assessors must be **contracted** to work directly with the centre, contributing to all aspects of standardisation. The centre must ensure a process of training is followed, including during induction and quality assurance activities. Occupationally competent and qualified assessors from the centre must use direct observation to assess practical skills-based outcomes.

Section 3: support

Support materials

The following support materials are available to assist with the delivery of this qualification and are available on the NCFE website:

- learning resources
- Qualification Factsheet.

Other support materials

The resources and materials used in the delivery of this qualification must be age-appropriate and due consideration should be given to the wellbeing and safeguarding of learners in line with your institute's safeguarding policy when developing or selecting delivery materials.

Products to support the delivery of this qualification may be available. For more information about these resources and how to access them, please visit the NCFE website.

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Appendix A: units

To simplify cross-referencing assessments and quality assurance, we have used a sequential numbering system in this document for each unit.

Mandatory units

Unit number	Regulated unit number	Unit title	Level	Credit	GLH
Unit 01	D/506/7501	Conducting subjective and objective assessment	4	7	47
Unit 02	H/506/7502	Provide sports massage techniques to prevent and manage injury	4	9	61
Unit 03	K/506/7503	Treatment modalities to support soft tissue repair	4	3	20

Change history record

Version	Publication date	Description of change
AIQ005031	November 2017	Document published
AIQ007205	May 2026	Updates made to assessment method; the units are assessed by an internally assessed and externally quality assured portfolio of evidence. No other updates made.
v2.0	November 2026	Qualification title changed and template updated to new version.