

QA Policy for Awarding 2026-27

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1. Introduction

This policy confirms what is required from you and what NCFE will do to support this process. This includes what we require in relation to internal quality assurance, preparing for your review and what you can expect from NCFE in relation to external quality assurance.

All NCFE products include those that may be offered and/or delivered under an NCFE-owned brand name, for example, CACHE.

1.1. Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to set out NCFE's approach to quality assurance for awarding for 2026/2027. We operate robust external quality assurance arrangements, which help us ensure the fairness and validity of the qualifications we award and centres' compliance with the requirements we set out.

1.2. Scope

This policy has been created in accordance with the requirements set out in NCFE's quality assurance arrangements.

1.3. Responsibilities/duties

The External Quality Assurance team is responsible for ensuring this policy is followed.

1.4. Definitions

Word/Acronym	Definition
AMR	Annual Monitoring Review
DCS	Direct Claims Status
EQA	External Quality Assurer
QA	Quality Assurance
QR	Quality Reviewer

1.5. Location

This policy is available on the NCFE website.

2. Quality assurance arrangements

Our external quality assurance model will support you throughout the session. We'll ensure that through our quality assurance review process, provider quality processes and procedures are robust and being applied in line with NCFE's and our regulators' requirements.



2.1. Centre approval reviews

Whether you're a new or already approved centre with us, if you'd like to add NCFE qualifications to your existing offering, you'll need to apply for approval.

Once approved, you'll receive an 'approved centre' certificate to display at your centre and a welcome email containing lots of information to help you get started.

2.1.1. What we need from you

First, you'll need to visit our [qualification page](#), add your qualifications to our basket and select which option applies to you.

1. Already an approved centre with NCFE – this allows existing centres to apply and gain approval for additional qualifications.
2. Register to become an approved NCFE centre – this allows new centres to select which qualifications you want to offer; you'll then need to complete an application for approval.

During this process, take a look at the [preparing for an approval review](#) page on our website. Here you'll find documentation to help you apply and prepare for approval. You must ensure that you collate evidence to support your approval review and have proof to meet the criteria in the report.

You must send all evidence at least two working days ahead of the review to confirm you are prepared and ready for the review to take place. If this is not received your review will be cancelled and you will be charged in accordance with our fees and pricing document. A new date will be agreed in line with the EQA's availability.

2.1.2 What you can expect from NCFE

On receipt of your application for NCFE centre approval, one of our team will contact you to arrange a date and time to conduct your review. You will then be allocated an EQA to carry this out.

We recommend you pay particular attention to the [User Guide to the Approval Report](#) which details each section of the review and provides you with examples of evidence you may wish to use.

If you're not approved first time, your EQA will work with you to discuss the next steps.

Approval for a qualification will lapse if you don't register candidates within two consecutive academic years, for example 1 August 2024 to 31 July 2026.

2.2. Annual monitoring review (AMR)

The focus of this review is to quality assure your centre's management and administration to ensure you remain compliant with our approval criteria. No learners will be sampled as part of this review, as this will be covered as part of an external quality assurance or moderation review.

You'll be allocated a Quality Reviewer (QR), who will conduct an AMR across all qualification groups. This means centre information around management and administration will only be reviewed once a year.

All active centres must have an AMR every session, failure to have an AMR within an academic session, may result in delays to learner certification if a sanction is applied, which will also impact your centre's risk rating.

If your centre is part of a group which has more than one NCFE account, it may be possible to carry out one AMR which covers multiple centres. If you feel this may be appropriate for your centre contact your allocated QR; the decision to do so will be made by NCFE.

2.2.1. What we need from you

Your QR will send you information via email to confirm your review and will direct you to our [User Guide to the Annual Monitoring Report](#) webpage to ensure you're well supported prior to the review date. This guide also details each section of the review and provides you with examples of evidence you may wish to use.

If you are delivering T Level qualifications, your AMR must take place between September and February, for all other qualifications it can take place at any time during the session.

If a T Level providers registers learners in March, April or May outside of our AMR review period (September – February), their AMR will take place one month after students are registered.

During your first AMR, evidence will be required to support discussions with the centre for each of the criteria identified in the user guide. Examples of evidence you may provide are detailed against each criteria. You do not need to provide every item on the suggested evidence list – only the document(s) applicable to your centre.

In subsequent years, although all criteria will be discussed at your review, centres will only be required to submit evidence that has changed or been updated since your previous AMR. This will include evidence of any new processes or procedures. **You will be sent a self-assessment form prior to the AMR to confirm which of your policies have changed since the previous review.**

Your centre will be given a risk rating, viewable on the AMR report. If your QR sets actions in the report or rates your centre as medium or high risk, they may deem it necessary to have a follow up review within the same session.

It's important that you identify the correct person(s) to lead this review on behalf of the centre. This review is not sector-specific; it's a high-level overview of all quality management and administration arrangements you have in place to support the running of NCFE qualifications.

If there are any changes to key personnel for example head of centre, NCFE must be notified promptly and in advance of an AMR taking place via our 'Change of centre contact details form' on the website, so that correct details are available to plan the review.

You must send all evidence at least two working days ahead of the review to confirm you are prepared and ready for the review to take place. If this is not received your review will be cancelled and you will be charged in accordance with our fees and pricing document. A new date will be agreed in line with the EQA's availability.

2.2.2. What you can expect from NCFE

Once you're approved to offer our products and have registered learners, we'll carry out an AMR each session. The review will cover all qualifications with active registrations within the last 24 months from the date of the review.

Your QR will contact you to suggest a date and time that works for both of you to conduct the AMR. **They will also send you a self-assessment form to complete prior to the review. If you have had an AMR in a previous session and are rated low risk you will not need to upload all policies for review again, we only want to see documentation where changes have been made.**

Please note that no learner portfolios will be sampled during this review and the QR will not provide any subject-specific guidance.

2.3. External quality assurance

For each quality assurance (QA) group, you'll be allocated a dedicated EQA who'll complete up to two external quality assurance reviews per QA group, covering all the qualifications with active registrations. Your EQA will be allocated once you have registered your learners. **You must register your learners within 90 days of them starting the qualification otherwise a late registration fee will apply in line with our [Fees and Pricing 2026-2027](#).**

Sampling: as an awarding organisation, we must ensure that assessment of all components of a qualification is subject to quality assurance activity. We'll review an appropriate sample of assessment by the centre, and when agreeing what sample size is appropriate, we must consider:

- any specific risks that relate to that centre, assessment, or qualification
- the number of learners registered for the qualification at the centre
- the range of attainments demonstrated by those learners
- the number of assessors at the centre involved in assessing the relevant criteria
- the number of persons involved in internal quality assurance in relation to assessment at the centre.

Our external quality assurance sampling strategy can be reviewed by centres on our webpage. This strategy is applicable to all internally assessed assessments that are subject to an external quality assurance review.

Direct Claims Status (DCS): DCS is our reward system to encourage best practice. You can claim learner certificates without authorisation from your EQA once you've achieved DCS.

DCS is awarded for individual qualifications. We decide whether to award DCS based on judgements your EQA makes after your external quality assurance reviews.

How DCS is awarded depends on your centre's performance and the number of reviews by an EQA. This is explained on our DCS webpage.

2.3.1. What we need from you

In line with NCFE's Centre Agreement, you should work with the quality assurance processes specified in any documentation made available by us in relation to delivery, assessment, or grading, and assist us in carrying out any reasonable monitoring and quality assurance activities.

You should agree with your EQA the date for your review well in advance of certification. It's important that you let your EQA know who will be responsible for coordinating the external quality assurance review for all qualifications in the QA group to ensure that we're contacting the most appropriate person.

If there are any changes to key personnel such as programme contact, NCFE must be notified promptly and in advance of an external quality assurance review taking place via our Change of centre contact details form on the website, so that correct details are available to plan the review.

To get the most out of your external quality assurance review, it'll be necessary for delivery staff involved in all qualifications within the QA group to organise and plan together so that the required documentation for all qualifications is presented and available for the review.

We recommend you pay particular attention to the User Guide to the External Quality Assurance Report which details each section of the review and provides you with examples of evidence you may wish to use. There is also a video guide.

You should share your assessor and IQA tracking document with your EQA on request, typically 4-6 weeks prior to the review. Your EQA will use this to create a sampling plan which they will then share with you.

You must send all evidence at least two working days ahead of the review to confirm you are prepared and ready for the review to take place. If this is not received your review will be cancelled and you will be charged in accordance with our fees and pricing document. A new date will be agreed in line with the EQA's availability.

Once your EQA review has taken place you should ensure that certificate claims are made promptly to ensure timely results for learners.

If you are delivering Vocational Technical Qualifications (VTQs), all learners who require a result on level 3 results days in August must complete their internal quality assurance and have their external quality review on or before 30 June each session. They must also make certificate claims by a deadline in July which is set by NCFE each year to guarantee results are released on time. Centres must keep planned end dates up to date in the NCFE Portal if any learners are extending beyond the results day.

2.3.2. What you can expect from NCFE

Your EQA will send you information via email to confirm your review and will direct you to our webpage preparing for an external quality assurance review to ensure you're well supported prior to the review date. This page will assist you in your preparation and will provide you with all documentation required.

Your external quality assurance review may take place face-to-face or remotely.

The type of review will be determined by previous external quality assurance reviews, the size of your centre and the number of qualifications offered. During the external quality assurance review, your EQA will sample a range of learner portfolios from the qualifications you deliver in each QA group.

If your centre is deemed high risk based on outstanding actions from previous external quality assurance activity, your AMR (if relevant), poor assessment and internal quality assurance practice, or any other concerns highlighted to us, we'll schedule a face-to-face review.

2.4. Moderation reviews

For T Level and V Cert qualifications moderation take place at the end of the assessment window and before results are issued and helps us to ensure assessment judgements made by centres are in line with NCFE's guidelines and are reliable across centres.

For T Level Technical Qualification in Education and Early Years, visiting moderation takes place throughout the assessment window (for more information on this please see the 'Education and Early Years information on our website).

During moderation the moderator will re-assess a sample of learners' non-exam assessments (NEA)/Occupational Specialism (OS) marked by assessors within the centre.

Moderators will look at a subsample of learner work (either remotely or through a visit), unaware of the marks awarded by your centre's assessors. The sample size will be selected using Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ) sampling guidelines and include assessments from across a range of centre marks, which include a learner with the highest centre mark and a learner with the lowest non-zero centre mark. Where an assessment has been carried out by more than one assessor, all assessors will be included in the sample, where possible.

2.4.1. What we need from you

Make the most of the support available from us by registering your learners early. You can do this through the [Portal](#).

You should:

- Read the Qualification Specification and all supporting documents on the individual qualification page.
- Attend our administration and standardisation training. This training will support you to make reliable assessment decisions and reduce any differences between assessor and moderator marks. Centre attendance will be checked as part of your AMR.
- If you are delivering a T Level qualification, book your learners on to their chosen OS before the deadline outlined in the [Key Date Schedule](#).
- Enter marks for all learners on the Portal before the end of the assessment window, as outlined in the T Level KDS.
- Withdraw any inactive learners on the Portal. Failure to withdraw learners in a timely manner will result in an action on your AMR report.
- Notify us promptly if there are any changes to key personnel such as programme contact, via our [Change of centre contact details](#) form on the website, so that correct details are available to plan the moderation review (visiting moderation only).

Information on bespoke moderation guidelines per qualification can be reviewed on our [preparing for a moderation review](#) webpage.

2.4.2. What you can expect from NCFE

When awarding marks, moderators and assessors will make professional judgements based on their knowledge and experience. As with any professional judgement, we understand it's unlikely that there will be precise agreement, so a small tolerance is allowed on the NEA.

During moderation, the marks awarded by the moderator for the subsample of NEAs will be compared with the marks awarded by assessors. If the differences between the moderator marks and assessor marks are within the tolerance, assessor marks will be accepted. If the marks for one or more learners in the sample are outside the tolerance, the moderator will expand their sample and re-assess additional NEAs. This is stage 2 sampling. Following this sample, if marking is considered consistent, we'll apply an adjustment to all learners in the cohort using a linear regression mechanism.

If marking is considered inconsistent (marking is deemed inconsistent if the difference between the most extreme values of the moderator mark minus centre mark is greater than twice the tolerance), the moderator will further widen their sample. This is stage 3 sampling. If learner marks can be adjusted satisfactorily using the linear regression mechanism, we'll apply an adjustment to all learners in the cohort. Alternatively, if moderator marks are available for all learners in the cohort, moderator marks will be applied.

At this stage it may be necessary to apply different adjustments across the mark range, depending on the findings from stage 3 moderation. The action will be determined by the chief moderator, who will consider if:

- The moderator should re-assess the work of all learners at the centre, in which case the moderator's marks will be applied.
- The centre should re-assess the work of all its learners in this case; a fresh sample will be reassessed by the moderator.
- Internal standardisation within the centre has not been effective. In this case separate samples may be taken from assessors, and adjustments applied, to individual teaching groups.
- Centre assessment decisions are inconsistent across options within the OS practical activity assessment. In this case separate samples may be taken from, and adjustments applied to, individual options.

3. Internal quality assurance

Internal quality assurance should be completed for all internal assessments as per your centre's assessment and internal quality assurance strategy.

The purpose of internal quality assurance is to provide assessors with confidence in the grades they have awarded, to ensure fairness and objectivity of decisions and to confirm consistency in the application of assessment criteria and standards. All internal quality assurance processes should be completed prior to any grades being submitted for EQA approval.

For qualifications which are quality assured through moderation, internal quality assurance should continue being an integral part of the assessment process however,

the Internal Quality Assurer (IQA) will not make any formal assessment decisions, and no evidence of documentation will be reviewed by NCFE.

There are a number of documents available to support your centres internal quality assurance process which can be located within the [course file documents](#) section of our website.

We also hold training sessions each year to support centres with assessment and internal quality assurance. These dates will be published on our website.

4. Cancellation of a planned review

4.1. By the centre

Quality reviews with our EQA team are a vital part of our quality assurance process.

If a planned review (approval, AMR, EQA, moderation, support or additional) needs to be cancelled by the centre for whatever reason, a minimum of 10 working days' notice should be provided.

The programme contact or another centre contact would be expected to inform the EQA/Moderator/QR and/or our Customer Support team if they need to cancel a review.

If visits/reviews are not cancelled within 10 working days, we reserve the right to charge the centre in line with our published [fees and pricing list](#).

In the event of repeated cancellation of reviews, we reserve the right to apply sanctions.

4.2. By NCFE

Our [preparing for quality assurance reviews](#) webpage gives clear guidance on information and documents required to be sent ahead of your planned review.

Failure to send the required information within the specified timescales will result in your quality assurance review being cancelled. Should the review be cancelled, a new date will be arranged in line with EQA/Moderator/QR availability. This may result in delays to certificate claims (EQA only).

If during the review the EQA/Moderator/QR identifies missing evidence, this will be requested during the review; failure to supply this during the review will result in an action on the report and a potential delay in certification of results (EQA only).

5. Centre risk rating

As a result of the AMR, centres will be awarded a risk status based on the evidence reviewed. This status will be displayed on the front of the annual monitoring report and will also show on all individual external quality assurance reports for the centre.

High risk: if a centre is rated as high risk, an interim AMR would be arranged with the QR later in the session (after six months), to review what progress has been made with the actions set.

Medium and low risk: any actions set for the centre would be reviewed at the next planned AMR in the following session.

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. The risk rating of a centre will not impact DCS of individual qualifications within a centre. This will continue to be monitored via the external quality assurance process.

During the session, if NCFE is made aware of any instances where a centre has not been compliant with our policies and procedures and an investigation takes place, the result of this investigation could impact and change a centre's risk rating and impact DCS. In such cases, the centre would be made aware through the investigation process. The Provider Assurance team would also inform the allocated QR alongside the EQA. The new risk status would remain until the next AMR takes place.

6. Enquiries about results for internal assessment decisions

6.1. External quality assurance review

EQAs will provide feedback on whether the learner evidence presented is sufficient and the grade or pass mark is in line with the required criteria. If not, the assessment decision may be rejected until sufficient evidence can be obtained. If the centre and the EQA cannot reach an agreement on this, they can follow our [Enquiries about Results and Assessment Decisions Policy](#) as a last resort.

An enquiry about the decisions of an internally marked assessment allows you the opportunity to question if the assessment criteria guidance was fairly, reliably, and consistently applied during the external quality assurance process. We will appoint a member of staff who was not involved in the original assessment decision to conduct the enquiry.

6.2. Moderation

A review of moderator marks is a check on the original moderation to make sure the assessment criteria has been applied fairly, reliably, and consistently. Please note this is not a re-mark and no specific feedback will be provided.

This service is not available for individual learners. Requests must be made by unit/component for all learners in a cohort.

If provider marks were taken forward as final marks, this process is not available.

Centres should ensure they are familiar with our [Enquires about Results and Assessment Decisions Policy](#)

Requests for a review of marks awarded during moderation can be submitted through the [Review of Moderator Marks request form](#).

7. Additional information and support

We have a range of events and training running throughout the year to further support you. You can find more details on these by using the links below.

- [Assessor](#) and [Internal Quality Assurance](#) training
- [Functional Skills events](#)
- [Functional Skills training](#)
- [V Cert events](#)
- [V Cert training](#)
- [T Level events](#)
- [T Level YouTube](#)
- Essential Digital Skills ([EDSQ](#)) events

We stand ready to support you and your staff this year, and our Customer Support team is available to answer any questions you may have – call us on 0191 239 8000 or email us at customersupport@ncfe.org.uk.

8. Initial equality impact assessment

An Initial Equality Impact Assessment has been completed for this policy, and no concerns were raised.

9. References to associated documents

User guide to External Quality Assurance Review

- User guide to Annual Monitoring Reviews
- User guide to approval reviews
- EQA sampling strategy
- Enquiries and results and assessment policy
- Fees and Pricing
- Key Date Schedule

10. Implementation and dissemination

This policy is available on the NCFE website.

11. Monitoring arrangements

This policy is reviewed annually by the External Quality Assurance team.

12. Data retention

This policy does not involve the gathering of any specific data; therefore, no data retention timelines or requirements are needed.