



Support handbook

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Summary of changes

This summarises the changes to this support handbook.

Version	Publication date	Summary of amendments
v1.0	September 2021	First publication
v1.1	September 2022	Guidance added on annual monitoring reviews
v1.2	October 2023	Guidance on assessment principles added
v1.3	May 2026	<p>Updated NCFE assessment principles for adult care, childcare early years and health qualifications.</p> <p>Early Years Educator (EYE) and Early Years Practitioner (EYP) assessment principles have been merged with the NCFE assessment principles.</p>

Introduction

This handbook contains supporting information that relates to NCFE qualifications and will assist in planning, delivery and assessment. It must be used alongside the mandatory qualification specification linked on the NCFE website which contains specific information about individual qualifications.

The qualification specification contains details of all the units and assessments required to complete the qualification.

Centres must ensure they are using the most up-to-date version of the qualification specification; the version number and date can be found within the qualification specification.

If the qualification is advertised using a different or shortened name, it is important to ensure that learners are aware that their final certificate will state the full regulated qualification title.

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 - this includes the use of any image or part of an image in individual or group projects and assessment materials
 - all images have a signed model release
- the resources and materials used in the delivery of the qualifications must be age-appropriate and due consideration should be given to the wellbeing and safeguarding of learners in line with the centre's safeguarding policy when developing or selecting delivery materials

Guided learning hours (GLH)

Guided learning is the activity of a learner being taught or instructed by – or otherwise participating in education or training under the immediate guidance or supervision of – a lecturer, supervisor, tutor or other appropriate provider of education or training.

For these purposes, the activity of 'participating in education or training' shall be treated as including the activity of being assessed if the assessment takes place under the immediate guidance or supervision of a lecturer, supervisor, tutor or other appropriate provider of education or training.

Total qualification time (TQT)

Total qualification time is the number of notional hours which represents an estimate of the total amount of time that could reasonably be expected to be required in order for a learner to achieve and demonstrate the achievement of the level of attainment necessary for the award of a qualification.

Total qualification time comprises:

- the guided learning hours for the qualification
- an estimate of the number of hours a learner will reasonably be likely to spend in preparation, study or any other form of participation in education or training, including assessment, which takes place as directed by – but not under the immediate guidance or supervision of – a lecturer, supervisor, tutor or other appropriate provider of education or training

Essential skills

While completing a qualification, learners may develop the knowledge, understanding and essential skills employers look for in employees. These range from familiar 'key skills', such as team working, independent learning and problem solving, to more tricky-to-measure skills, such as:

- an appreciation for appropriate behaviour and dress
- appropriate interpersonal skills
- communicating with professional colleagues/peers and/or hierarchical seniors
- supporting other aspiring employees
- personal manners
- understanding work practices and how different roles and departments function within an organisation

Mapping to national occupational standards

National occupational standards (NOS) are owned by a sector skills council (SSC) or standard-setting body (SSB) and describe the skills, knowledge and understanding needed to undertake a particular task or job at different levels of competence.

Recognition of prior learning (RPL)

Centres may recognise prior learning at their discretion if they are satisfied that the evidence provided meets the requirements of a qualification. Where RPL is to be used extensively (for a whole unit or more), advice must be given by a qualified RPL advisor.

For more information, please refer to the recognition of prior learning (RPL) credit accumulation and transfer (CAT) policy on the policies and documents page the NCFE website.

Direct claim status

To encourage best practice, we offer a system called direct claim status (DCS). Achievement of DCS allows centres to claim learner certificates without needing authorisation from an external quality assurer (EQA).

DCS is awarded for an individual qualification and is based on quality criteria that are measured and reported on through the external quality assurance reviews carried out by your EQA. DCS is available for most of NCFE's regulated qualifications once a centre has met the criteria to be awarded DCS.

You can find out which qualifications qualify, and how to gain DCS on the delivery and learner support page of the NCFE website, or for more information please contact our customer support team.

Work/industry placement/experience requirements

Some qualifications may require learners to complete a placement or work experience. Please refer to the qualification specification for more information.

There are specific requirements for centres and employers relating to the insurance of learners in the workplace. Further information about insurance can be found at [The Abi](#) or [The Health and Safety Executive \(HSE\)](#).

Qualifications with simulation and assessment in a realistic work environment (RWE)

Where the assessment strategy, guidance or requirements for a unit/qualification allow, it is essential that organisations wishing to operate an RWE do so in an environment which reflects a real work setting and replicates the key characteristics of the workplace in which the skill to be assessed is normally employed. This will ensure that any competence achieved in this way will be sustained in real employment.

Qualification dates

Regulated qualifications have operational end dates and certification end dates.

NCFE review qualifications regularly, working with sector representatives, vocational experts and stakeholders to make any changes necessary to meet sector needs and to reflect recent developments.

If a decision is made to withdraw a qualification, NCFE will set an operational end date and provide reasonable notice to centres, taking reasonable steps to protect the interest of learners.

An operational end date will only show on the regulator's qualification database and the NCFE website if a decision has been made to withdraw a qualification. After this date, learner registrations can no longer be accepted. However, certification is allowed until the certification end date so that learners have time to complete any programmes of study. The certification end date will only show once an operational end date has been set. After this date, certification claims can no longer be processed.

Where a qualification has an external assessment, this can only be taken up to the last assessment date set by NCFE. No external assessments will be permitted after this date so learners will need to be booked in sufficient time. Visit the NCFE website for more information.

NCFE assessment principles for adult care, childcare, early years and health qualifications

(Please note the previously published assessment principles specific to early years educator (EYE) and early years practitioner (EYP) qualifications have now been encompassed within this overarching NCFE assessment principles for adult care, childcare, early years and health qualifications)

1. Introduction

1.1 These principles and approaches to unit/qualification assessments should be read alongside individual unit assessment requirements, where appropriate.

1.2 These principles will ensure a consistent approach to those elements of assessment which require further interpretation and definition, and support sector confidence.

1.3 The centre needs to ensure that individuals undertaking assessor or quality assurer roles within the centre conform to the Sector Skills Council and/or NCFE assessment principles for the unit they are assessing or quality assuring.

To access a full copy of the Sector Skills Council's requirements please refer to the relevant sector body website, useful links have been provided below.

[Skills for Care](#)
[Skills for Health](#)

Assessing knowledge, skills and competence

Learners will need to meet all of the assessment criteria for knowledge, skills and competence included in the qualification using appropriate assessment methods.

Practical skills competence

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. Further information and guidance can be found below:

2. Assessment principles

2.1 Assessment decisions for competence/skills-based learning outcomes must relate to experience gained in a real work environment (RWE).

A RWE is an environment specifically designed to replicate a real work setting, enabling learners to demonstrate competence in conditions that mirror those they would encounter in actual employment.

2.2 Assessment decisions for competence/skills-based learning outcomes must be made by an occupationally competent assessor, qualified to make assessment decisions.

2.3 Competence/skills-based assessment must include direct observation as the main source of evidence.

2.4 Simulation may only be utilised as an assessment method for competence-based learning outcomes where this is specified in the assessment requirements.

2.5 Given the nature of work with children, young people, service users and their families (if applicable),

which may from time to time include sensitive situations requiring confidentiality/privacy, there may be a need to make use of an expert witness testimony (EWT) as a source of performance evidence in the workplace.

Expert witnesses can be drawn from experienced individuals who can attest to the learner's performance in the workplace. This may include line managers or other experienced colleagues from inside an organisation or from other agencies. This may prove particularly important for those learners who work unsupervised, but who have contact with a range of different professionals in the course of their work activities.

Expert witnesses must only be used for observation where they have occupational expertise of specialist areas or the observation is of a particularly sensitive nature. The expert witness must hold a qualification in workplace assessment or a role evaluating staff performance within their area of expertise. It is not necessary for expert witnesses to hold an assessor qualification, as a qualified assessor must assess the testimony provided by an expert witness when making summative assessment decisions. See also section 4.5.

The centre should enable expert witnesses to provide and present their evidence in an efficient way that does not compromise validity and reliability. This could include the following:

- the use of voice and audio recordings
- through remote discussions where the main assessor could scribe the expert witness contributions (for example, via Microsoft Teams or Zoom)
- over the telephone where the assessor could scribe the testimony

Additionally, centres must adapt their internal quality assurance strategies to ensure that assessor judgements based on EWT are prioritised for standardisation and sampling activities.

The use of professional discussion and reflective accounts can be used to support other forms of evidence but are not direct evidence sources that can replace the observation requirement.

2.6 Assessment of knowledge-based learning outcomes may take place in or outside of a RWE.

2.7 Assessment decisions for knowledge-based learning outcomes must be made by an occupationally knowledgeable member of staff, qualified to make assessment decisions. The centre with whom the learners are registered will be responsible for making all assessment decisions.

Remote technology

2.8 The use of remote technology is prohibited within early years, school, childcare, health and adult care settings where there is a potential risk of users of the service, or their carers/families, being inadvertently seen or heard. This includes the use of all recording and streaming devices such as mobile phones, laptops and tablets. Please note that technology must not be used to view assessments remotely, even when not recording. For example, assessors cannot complete remote observations to prove competency by viewing learners 'live' using remote technology.

The use of remote technologies could be considered to support aspects of the learner's performance. For example, this may include planning sessions, online meetings and remote activities in which the learner is contributing, and where the assessor could also attend remotely or observe through use of technology. In these examples, the learner **MUST** be in an environment away from any children, young people, service users and their families. The use of technologies could also be considered for capturing EWT.

2.9 Where permitted by sector or qualification guidelines, technology may be used to remotely observe learners' task-based competencies, such as online meetings or remote support to colleagues. Such evidence must be clearly marked and distinguished from other types. It should not be used when there is a requirement for direct interaction with individuals using care or support services or others.

2.10 The remote observation approach is supplementary and does not replace direct observation as the primary assessment method. It should be used to support and enhance planned direct assessments throughout the qualification.

3. Internal quality assurance

3.1 Internal quality assurance is key to ensuring that the assessment of evidence for units is of a consistent and appropriate quality. Those carrying out internal quality assurance must be occupationally knowledgeable in the area they are assuring and be qualified to make quality assurance decisions.

Knowledge learning outcomes:

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

Competence/skills learning outcomes:

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

4. Definitions

4.1 Occupationally competent:

This means that each assessor must be capable of carrying out the full requirements within the competency units they are assessing. Being occupationally competent means they are also occupationally knowledgeable. This occupational competence should be maintained through clearly demonstrable continuing learning and professional development.

4.2 Occupationally knowledgeable:

This means that each assessor should possess relevant knowledge and understanding, and be able to assess this in units designed to test specific knowledge and understanding, or in units where knowledge and understanding are components of competency. This occupational knowledge should be maintained through clearly demonstrable continuing learning and professional development.

4.3 Qualified to make assessment decisions:

This means that each assessor must hold a qualification suitable to support the making of appropriate and consistent assessment decisions. Awarding organisations will determine what will qualify those making assessment decisions according to the unit of competence under assessment.

Assessors of these qualifications should be appropriately qualified to make assessment decisions. Although it is not a specific requirement of these qualifications, we consider it to be good practice for assessors to hold, or be working towards, a recognised qualification in assessment. Where a recognised qualification is not held, assessors should be able to demonstrate relevant and current experience of assessment.

In order to assess knowledge-based units, the assessor should be occupationally knowledgeable. They should have relevant knowledge to assess units designed to test the knowledge and understanding of learners. This knowledge should be demonstrable through relevant qualifications/experience, and at an equivalent or higher level than the units under assessment.

In order to assess competence-based units, the assessor should be occupationally competent. They should be able to carry out the requirements of the units they are assessing. This competence should be demonstrable through relevant qualifications/experience, and at an equivalent or higher level than the units under assessment. The following are examples of qualifications/roles that tutors/teachers/assessors may hold to be able to make decisions involving the assessment of learners:

- an assessor qualification such as D32/D33, A1/A2 or a Level 3 Award/Certificate in Assessing Vocationally Related Achievement
- Qualified Teacher Status/Early Years Professional Status
- Certificate in Education in Post Compulsory Education (PCE)
- Certificate/Diploma in Teaching in the Lifelong Learning Sector (CTLLS, DTLLS)
- Level 5 Early Years Senior/Lead Practitioner
- Level 5 Specialist Teaching Assistant
- Higher-level teaching assistant

Any examples given are not intended to be exhaustive or definitive. Examples of relevant qualifications and occupational backgrounds are given as benchmarks. Other equivalent qualifications or backgrounds may also qualify prospective staff for assessment roles. Centres seeking further clarification should also refer to the [Joint Awarding Body Quality Group \(JABQG\) Guidance for Assessors and IQAs – acceptable qualifications](#) list on the [Skills for Care website](#), and/or also contact their external quality assurer in the first instance.

4.4 Qualified to make quality assurance decisions:

NCFE will determine what qualifications and/or experience is required in relation to the:

- role of the assessor for knowledge-based assessment criteria
- role of the assessor for skills/competence-based assessment criteria
- role of the internal quality assurer

If the assessor/internal quality assurer is knowledgeable but not yet qualified, a qualified assessor/internal quality assurer must make final decisions. A clear countersigning strategy should support and confirm decisions by unqualified staff until they are fully qualified.

4.5 Expert witness:

Evidence from expert witnesses must meet the tests of validity, reliability and authenticity. Expert witnesses will need to demonstrate:

- they have a working knowledge of the units on which their expertise is based
- they are occupationally competent in their area of expertise
- they have **either** any qualification in assessment of workplace performance **or** a professional work role which involves evaluating the everyday practice of staff
- they have current or recent (within the last 2 years) experience of working at or above the level for which they are attesting competence
- they can demonstrate appropriate, continuing professional development relevant to the sector for which they are attesting competence
- that they have no conflict of interest in the outcome of the evidence

Staffing requirements

Centres delivering any of NCFE's qualifications must:

- have a sufficient number of appropriately qualified/experienced assessors to assess the volume of learners they intend to register
- have a sufficient number of appropriately qualified/experienced internal quality assurers to internally quality assure the anticipated number of assessors and learners
- ensure that all staff involved in assessment and internal quality assurance are provided with appropriate training and undertake meaningful and relevant continuing professional development
- implement effective internal quality assurance systems and processes to ensure all assessment decisions are reliable, valid, authentic, sufficient and current - this should include standardisation to ensure consistency of assessment
- provide all staff involved in the assessment process with sufficient time and resources to carry out their roles effectively

If there are further staffing requirements specific to the qualification that you are delivering, this information can be found in the qualification specification.

Staff involved in the assessment and internal quality assurance of the qualification must be able to demonstrate that they have (or are working towards) the relevant occupational knowledge and/or occupational competence at the same level or higher as the units being assessed and internally quality assured. This may be gained through experience and/or qualifications.

Supervision of learners and the role of the internal assessor

Guidance on how to administer the internal assessment and the support provided to learners can be found on the NCFE website.

Feedback to learners

Guidance on providing feedback during teaching and learning and each stage of the assessment can be found on the NCFE website.

Quality assurance

Internal quality assurance

Internal quality assurance is the process of ensuring that everyone who assesses a particular unit in a centre is assessing to the same standards. It is the responsibility of internal quality assurers (IQAs) to ensure that assessors' decisions are sampled and monitored frequently throughout the assessment process to ensure consistency and fairness. IQAs are also responsible for supporting assessors by offering advice and guidance.

The IQA will follow the centre's own sampling strategy in selecting the sample to be internally quality assured. The timing of sampling should be considered in line with the assessment teams schedule and allow sufficient time for marking to take place. See the guidance on sampling on the NCFE website.

The IQA provides the vital link between the assessors and the external quality assurer (EQA) and acts as the centre's quality assurance agent.

External quality assurance

External quality assurance monitors the internal quality assurance activity of the centre. External quality assurance of internal assessments is carried out at least once a year, in line with a centre's assessment schedule, to ensure that assessment and grading decisions are in line with required standards. External quality assurance is carried out by EQAs who are appointed, trained and monitored by NCFE. EQAs are responsible for monitoring and sampling learners' evidence to ensure that internal assessment decisions are valid, reliable, fair and consistent with national standards. Centres are notified of their EQA's contact details on registration of learners with us.

Annual Monitoring Reviews

Following centre approval, NCFE will carry out an annual monitoring review each session to check that quality assurance policies and procedures remain compliant with NCFE's centre agreement and approval criteria. The focus of the review is on management systems and administration of all NCFE qualifications with active registrations. Learner portfolios aren't sampled during this review.

Further guidance can be found in the user guide to the annual monitoring review (AMR) report available on the NCFE website.

Presenting evidence

Written

Where appropriate, written evidence may be presented in word-processed or handwritten form. Audio-visual content (for example, videos, pictures, drawings and audio) may also be used.

Tables, graphs and spreadsheets may be produced using appropriate ICT.

Any referenced material must be suitably acknowledged, and quotations must be clearly marked and a reference provided wherever possible to ensure that learner work can be authenticated a learners' guide to referencing can be found on the policy and documents page of the NCFE website.

Recorded

Where appropriate, audio-visual evidence of multiple learners may be used. Centres must ensure that each learner being assessed is clearly visible and can be identified by the examiner/quality assurer.

The recorded evidence should allow the learner to demonstrate the learning outcomes clearly but should only show work relevant to what is being assessed. For example, if a performance/participation is done as part of a group, the examiner/quality assurer will need to be able to see how each learner being assessed has contributed and met the learning outcomes.

To help NCFE's examiners and quality assurers identify clearly when a particular learner is performing/participating, it is recommended to include the following information:

- the exact start and finish times so that the examiner/quality assurer can go straight to that spot on the tape/recording
- a running order list and a description of each learner
- information about where the performance/recorded evidence took place
- what type of audience they were performing to (if applicable)

Centres must also ensure that the camera and microphone are set up in a suitable place to ensure good-

quality audio. This will allow the examiner/quality assurer to hear both the learners and the assessor (if applicable).

Submitting unit grades

Where a qualification is graded, each internally assessed unit within the portfolio of evidence must be assessed and graded by assessors in the centre.

Learner work must then be checked in line with internal quality assurance processes by an IQA to ensure consistency and for standardisation.

Learners may revise and redraft work up until it is submitted to the assessor for end-of-unit assessment and grading. Once the work has been assessed, graded and internally quality assured, the grades should be submitted to us on the submit grades page of the NCFE portal.

Following the external quality assurance review, the unit grades will either be accepted and banked by NCFE's EQA or, if they disagree with the grades, they will be rejected. If the grades are rejected, the work cannot be given back to the learner. If a grade is rejected, centres must reassess, re-grade and internally quality assure the work, and resubmit the new unit grade.

Once the grades for the internally assessed units of the qualification have been accepted and banked by your external quality assurer, learners are permitted one opportunity to revise and redraft their work. The additional work will need to be assessed, graded and internally quality assured again, and the centre will be required to resubmit the updated grade on the submit grades page of the NCFE portal for further external quality assurance. Learners are only permitted one resubmission of internally assessed work.

Why would the unit grades be rejected by an external quality assurer?

This would occur if the EQA did not agree with the grades the centre had submitted. It may be that the centre had been grading too harshly, too leniently, or inconsistently from one learner to the next. In this situation, the centre would be required to assess, grade and internally quality assure all learners' work again.

Late submissions

Tutors and assessors should encourage learners to understand the importance of deadlines and when they need to submit their internal assessments, if required.

Learners may only be given extra time for legitimate reasons such as illness. If centres accept a late submission, they should follow the usual assessment process.

Grades should not be reduced as a result of late submission.

Support

There are a number of supporting documents available to help with the delivery of NCFE's qualifications. These are available to download from the policies and documents page on the NCFE website or can be requested from the customer support team.

Learner's evidence tracking log (LETL)

The LETL can help learners keep track of their work. This document can be downloaded free of charge from the qualifications page on the NCFE website. Centres may use their own evidence tracking

documentation or use the LETL provided.

Evidence and grading tracker

The evidence and grading tracker can help learners keep track of their work. This document can be downloaded free of charge from the qualifications page on the NCFE website. Centres may use their own evidence tracking documentation or use the evidence and grading tracker provided.

Learning resources

We offer a wide range of learning resources and materials to support the delivery of NCFE qualifications. Please check the qualifications page on the NCFE website for more information and to see what is available for NCFE qualifications.

Resource considerations

Resources and materials used in the delivery of the 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.

Qualification factsheet

This document outlines the key qualification information for the centre, learner and employer.

Customer support team

NCFE's customer support team will support centres with approvals, registrations, the administration of external quality assurance reviews, external assessment, results and certification.

Fees and pricing

The current fees and pricing guide is available on the policies and documents page on the NCFE website.

Nested suites

Learners can progress between qualifications in the suite, for example, from an award to a certificate or diploma to extended diploma. In this case, a conversion fee will apply.

Please check the current fees and pricing guide on the policies and documents page on the NCFE website for more information.

Training and support

NCFE can provide training sessions for assessors and internal quality assurers. Bespoke subject-specific training is also available. Further information on training and events can be found on the delivery and learner support page of the NCFE website, or alternatively, you can contact the quality assurance team.

Equal opportunities

We fully support the principle of equal opportunities and oppose all unlawful or unfair discrimination on the grounds of protected characteristics (as defined in current equalities legislation) or other characteristics (such as domestic circumstances or social background). We aim to ensure that equality of opportunity is

promoted and that unlawful or unfair discrimination, whether direct or indirect, is eliminated both in our employment practices and in access to qualifications. A copy of our diversity and equality policy is available on the policy and documents page of the NCFE website.

Diversity, access and inclusion

Our qualifications and associated assessments are designed to be accessible, inclusive and non-discriminatory. We regularly evaluate and monitor protected characteristics (as defined in current equalities law) throughout the development process as well as throughout the delivery, external quality assurance and external assessment processes of live qualifications. This ensures that positive attitudes and good relations are promoted, discriminatory language is not used and our assessment procedures are fully inclusive.

Access arrangements, reasonable adjustments and special considerations policies

These policies are aimed at anyone who uses our products and services and who submits requests for access arrangements, reasonable adjustments or special considerations. Learners who require access arrangements, reasonable adjustments or special consideration should discuss their requirements with their tutor.

For more information on the access arrangements reasonable adjustments, and special considerations policies, please visit the policies and documents page on the NCFE website.

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* To continue to improve our levels of customer service, telephone calls may be recorded for training and quality purposes.