

Role of the External Verifier Policy

Abstract

This policy defined the role, responsibilities and framework for external verifiers engaged in the evaluation and assurance of AIQ processes and compliance standards

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1. Introduction

External verifiers are appointed and employed by Active IQ. They have a crucial role in the quality assurance system, ensuring that the centre's own quality assurance systems are being implemented effectively to maintain national standards by:

- providing information, advice and support to centres
- verifying delivery, assessment practice and centre procedures
- maintaining records of visits and providing feedback to Active IQ
- applying appropriate compliance and risk ratings against approved centres according to the evidence presented to them

The external verifier will ensure that the assessment decisions are consistent with national standards by:

- monitoring and sampling learner assessment evidence
- monitoring internal quality assurance systems
- observing formative and summative assessment

The external verifier will:

- authorise certification claims, when necessary, if they are in agreement with centre decisions
- provide feedback to Active IQ on the operation of the qualifications in the centre
- give centres accurate advice regarding best practice
- ensure that the policy of equal opportunities, diversity and open access is adhered to
- act as a source of advice for centres and for Active IQ
- attend external verifier training and standardisation sessions arranged by Active IQ

All external verifiers are trained in the practice of external verification. External verifiers must hold an appropriate qualification (V2 or equivalent), or within 12 months of commencing their role, achieve the Level 4 Award in the External Quality Assurance of Assessment Processes and Practice.

2. The external verifier visit

External verifiers (EVs) will liaise with the centre contact prior to the visit to ensure that the requested portfolios, activities, learners, assessors, internal verifiers and locations will all be available.

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While undertaking a visit and/or as part of the overall monitoring approach per centre, each EV will:

- ensure, through appropriate sampling/moderation, that assessment arrangements are fit for purpose, and the criteria against which each learner's performance is differentiated are being applied consistently by assessors within and across centres, and in accordance with requirements specified for each qualification
- ensure the centre is taking all reasonable steps to prevent the occurrence of malpractice and maladministration
- confirm that any previously identified action points have been met
- confirm that assessments are conducted by appropriately qualified and occupationally expert assessors
- confirm all learners undertake an initial assessment in order to identify barriers to assessment, exemptions and/or recognition of prior learning (RPL)
- sample assessment decisions to confirm that the learner evidence is valid, authentic, reliable, current and sufficient, and that national standards are being consistently maintained and regulatory requirements adhered to. The EV will ensure that they take into account all admissible evidence that the learner has generated when making their judgements
- confirm that when Active IQ has set a rule as to the quantity or type of evidence generated by learners that can be admissible in an assessment, the centre has applied this rule to all learners taking the assessment (other than where any reasonable adjustments or special considerations require it to be altered)
- confirm that when Active IQ has set a rule as to how the final mark for a qualification is to be calculated from marks for different assessments, that the centre has applied this rule to all learners taking the assessment (other than where any reasonable adjustments or special considerations require it to be altered)
- confirm that assessment decisions are regularly sampled, through internal verification, for accuracy against the national standards
- check that claims for certification are valid, authentic, reliable, current and sufficient and are supported by auditable records which show learners have met the specified level of attainment, and that all admissible evidence generated by the learner as part of their assessment for their qualification has been taken into account
- take all reasonable steps to avoid any part of the assessment of a learner (including by way of moderation) being undertaken by any person who has a personal interest in the result of the assessment. Where, having taken all reasonable steps, an assessment by such a person cannot be avoided, the external verifier must make arrangements for the relevant part of the assessment to be subject to scrutiny by

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another person (internal verifier) and include the learner(s) in question within their sampling, where appropriate

- ensure that centres have rigorous security procedures in place to maintain confidentiality for externally assessed, externally marked theory papers, and that invigilation procedures are strictly adhered to with the exception of the theory papers sat under non-invigilated assessments in Cirrus. If a breach of confidentiality (including through the loss or theft of assessment materials) is either suspected by the EV or alleged by another person, the EV must report this immediately to the Head of Quality Assurance and they will ensure Active IQ investigates this breach, ensuring the malpractice and maladministration policy is adhered to
- ensure that the centre is retaining appropriate records of assessment and internal verification decisions for three years (in line with the Active IQ centre retention of learner information requirements)
- advise and support centres on the interpretation of national standards, learning outcomes and assessment criteria
- provide centres with up-to-date information and advice in line with Active IQ qualifications and regulatory authority guidance and requirements
- recommend the application of appropriate sanctions in line with our sanctions policy, where areas of non-compliance have been identified

3. Sampling

To make decisions on the matters listed above, an EV will sample the following at each visit and/or over a suitable period of time, recording the sample and the rationale behind its selection on the visit forms:

- evidence that assessors and internal verifiers have appropriate qualifications and experience to meet the assessment strategy for the awards/units they assess/verify
- evidence of continuous professional development (CPD) for assessors and internal verifiers and appropriate records
- evidence that learners have access to fair assessment
- evidence of valid claims for exemptions and/or recognition of prior learning (RPL)
- evidence that assessments are structured effectively in terms of planning, assessing, review and feedback
- assessment evidence (e.g. learner portfolio, theory paper results, eAssessment results and work-based evidence) to ensure they are appropriate
- evidence that assessors and internal verifiers are taking part in standardisation activities

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- the assessment decisions of all assessors
- all assessment locations to ensure standards are being consistently applied
- internal verification and assessment records including feedback to assessors
- learner registration and claim records for units and qualifications
- internal verification strategy and sampling records
- details of any appeals or reasonable adjustments
- evidence that the centre has a diversity and equality policy, appeals policy and complaints policy, and arrangements to prevent and investigate instances of malpractice and maladministration, and that these are being applied and monitored appropriately

To assist the EVs in their sampling activities, they will have access to information on the learners registered/certificated at the centre. Therefore, in developing a sampling strategy, an EV will take into account the specific circumstances of the centre being visited. Particular factors that will be considered in determining the scope of a sample may include:

- number of registered learners
- number of certificates claimed
- inexperienced or unqualified assessors who may not be familiar with the assessment methods or standards and may need careful monitoring until they develop the necessary expertise. Therefore, a sample will contain a sufficient proportion of their assessment decisions
- learner: assessor ratios
- internal verifier: assessor ratios
- the number of sub-centre/satellite sites and their geographical dispersion. Where a centre has a number of assessment sites, the sampling plan must enable the EV to verify that assessment and internal verification practices are maintained with equal rigour and consistency at all locations.
- the centre's track record in complying with our requirements and any agreed action plans
- rate of staff turnover

An EV will ensure that their sampling strategy involves not only the inspection of evidence, but also meetings with internal verifiers, assessors and learners, in order that the EV can confirm whether the process of assessment, as well as the standards being used to judge learner competence, are consistent and meet national standards.

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An EV will also ensure that the selection of learners, assessors and internal verifiers for sampling is not left to the discretion of the centre. The EV should therefore ensure that they choose the sample of the learners in order to minimise the risk of fraudulent claims for certification.

If a centre fails to make available learners selected for interview, the EV will inform the Head of Quality Assurance, and they will work together to require the centre to provide proof that these learners exist. If this cannot be clearly established, the EV and Head of Quality Assurance will work together to decide on what sanctions should be applied and the nature of any potential malpractice/maladministration investigation.

Whatever the precise plan used, the final sample must be sufficient for the EV to:

- confirm the consistency and authenticity of assessment decisions
- confirm the validity of claims for certification and authenticity of learners' evidence •
- provide evidence to support their conclusions
-

If the sample shows that the centre is not applying the required standards, the EV will:

- identify and record the specific area of concern
- record their findings in their report
- recommend sanctions, if appropriate
- create an appropriate action plan for the centre
- confirm that, should they have to overturn assessment decisions made by the centre in order to ensure that the assessment remains fit for purpose, or because of an inconsistency in the details we published or provided in relation to the assessment, they will:
 - immediately notify the Head of Quality Assurance to assess the impact on our qualifications, materials and/or certificates that have/have not been awarded and decide on appropriate action in accordance with our arrangements for dealing with actual/potential adverse effects
 - feed back immediately to the internal verifier and/or the main centre contact and request a further sample to ascertain the extent of the non-compliance

Also, it should be noted that some of our qualifications may include stimulus materials provided by us or by the centre to support assessments. The use of these should be reviewed from time to time during the centre visits to ensure that they, and the language they use, are appropriate.

They are only appropriate if they:

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- enable learners to demonstrate their level of attainment
- require knowledge, skills and understanding that are required for the qualification
- are clear and unambiguous (unless ambiguity forms part of the assessment), and are not likely to cause unnecessary offence to learners

In considering whether language and stimulus materials for an assessment are appropriate, an EV must take into account in particular:

- the age of learners who may reasonably be expected to take the qualification
- the level of the qualification
- the objective of the qualification, and the knowledge, skills and understanding assessed for the qualification
- whether the materials contain language or content that could lead a group of learners who share a common attribute or circumstance to experience (because of that attribute or circumstance) an unreasonable disadvantage in the level of attainment that they are able to demonstrate in the assessment

Across the whole of this process, the external verifier has the right to recommend to Active IQ that centre approval be withdrawn for a specific qualification or all qualifications if there is evidence of irretrievable breakdown in management and quality assurance, in line with Active IQ's sanctions policy.

4. External verifier reports and the frequency of visits

At the end of each visit the EV will provide a report to the centre that will:

- record the date of the visit
- detail the monitoring and verification activities undertaken, including information on any sampling undertaken and who was interviewed
- contain feedback to the centre on the quality and consistency of its assessment process and the effectiveness of internal verification/quality assurance arrangements
- highlight areas of good practice
- specify what actions the centre must take if its performance does not meet our requirements, when these actions must be completed and who is responsible for completing them
- if applicable, and only if serious weaknesses are found, detail any sanctions that will be imposed or will be recommended to managers within Active IQ to impose, with a rationale for such a decision (see the next section for details)

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EVs should report any potential or alleged malpractice immediately to the Head of Quality Assurance.

In addition to the regular EV visits, Active IQ reserves the right to carry out other pre-arranged or unannounced/spot visits in the interests of ensuring maintenance of quality standards. Such visits may be undertaken by the EV or other representative(s) from Active IQ (please refer to Active IQ's centre assessment scrutiny strategy (CASS)).

If the centre is unhappy with the conduct or outcome of a quality assurance visit, the matter should be taken up through our appeals procedure.

A copy of each report will be made available by the external verifier, within five working days of the visit taking place.

The number of visits per year will be calculated according to the CASS.

5. Claims for certification

Where the centre meets all the criteria for direct claims status (DCS), this will be awarded and reviewed at each visit. If there is a time lapse of more than 12 months between visits due to lack of assessment activity, it may be necessary to conduct another approval visit.

6. Overturning an assessment decision

The role of the external verifier ensures that assessment decisions are accurate, consistent and measured against awarding organisation criteria. In some instances, there may be times when an assessment decision made by an assessor is inaccurate and/or inconsistent. In these instances, an external verifier has the authority to overturn an assessment decision.

An adjustment to the assessment outcome may be made by the external verifier at an appropriate stage.

To avoid difficult situations, wherever possible the external verifier will try to intervene in the assessment process prior to the final assessment decision being communicated to the learner. In exceptional circumstances, if the external verifier feels that previous decisions made by the assessor or assessor team will also have been affected, then the external verifier may request that relevant assessment procedures are reviewed, and all relevant work reassessed.

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If the external verifier does have to intervene in the assessment process, they may need to discuss issues with the internal verifier, assessor or learner. In these situations, the centre must organise an opportunity for discussion to take place with the relevant individuals in appropriate surroundings.

The following areas of poor assessment practice may result in external verifier intervention:

- assessment of knowledge and skills that do not reflect the Active IQ qualification guidance and or meet national standards
- the assessment process disadvantages learners
- learners' work is not authentic
- health and safety requirements for the environment and physical resources are not adhered to
- insufficient qualified assessors to ensure assessment decisions cover validity, authenticity, reliability, currency, sufficiency (VARCS)
- assessor's decisions are inconsistent across the sample of learners and the range of evidence monitored by the external verifier
- no evidence of internal verification by a qualified internal verifier
- insufficient records for audit of assessment to take place
- claims for certification are made prior to all assessment requirements being achieved in full.

The following table provides examples of poor practice and potential resulting actions:

Poor assessment practice	Development points/sanctions
Assessment of knowledge and skills that does not reflect the Active IQ qualification specification and or meet national standards	- close scrutiny of assessment decisions - removal Of DCS - reassessment of learners - suspension of approval
The assessment process disadvantages learners	- assessment decisions have lost their integrity leading to possible invalid certification - suspension of registration and certification
Learners' work is not authentic	- assessment decisions have lost their integrity leading to possible invalid certification - suspension of registration and certification
Health and safety requirements for the environment and physical resources are not adhered to	development plan from Active IQ to ensure all future assessments meet the requirements
Insufficient qualified assessors to ensure assessment decisions cover VARS	- assessment decisions have lost their integrity leading to possible invalid certification - suspension of registration and certification
Assessor's decisions are inconsistent across the sample of learners and range of evidence monitored by the EV	- close scrutiny of assessment decisions - removal Of DCS - reassessment of learners where necessary
Assessment methods are not wide ranging enough to allow full achievement of the qualification	development plan from Active IQ to ensure all future assessments meet the requirements

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No evidence of internal verification by a qualified IV	- assessment decisions have lost their integrity leading to possible invalid certification - suspension of registration and certification
Insufficient records for audit of assessment to take place	development plan from Active IQ to ensure all future assessments meet the requirements
Claims for certification are made prior to all assessment requirements being achieved in full	- assessment decisions have lost their integrity leading to possible invalid certification - suspension of registration and certification

7. References to associated documents

- Active IQ's centre risk management policy
- Active IQ's appeals policy
- Active IQ's internal verification requirements for centres policy
- Active IQ's reasonable adjustment and special considerations policy
- Active IQ's malpractice and maladministration policy
- Active IQ's sanctions policy
- Active IQs CASS strategy

8. Implementation and dissemination

This policy will be implemented immediately upon approval and available on Active IQ QMS website.

9. Monitoring arrangements

We will review this document annually as part of our annual self-evaluation arrangements and revise it as necessary in response to customer and learner feedback, changes in our practices, actions from the regulatory authorities or external agencies, changes in legislation, or trends identified.

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This policy will be reviewed in six months by relevant Active IQ and NCFE colleagues to ensure document is aligned and fit for purpose following full integration of Active IQ.

10. Data retention

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

11. Contact us

If you have any queries about the contents of this document, please contact our external verifier team on:

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