



A Guide to Quality Assurance: Monitoring Activities

This guide sets out the methods used by SFEDI Awards to monitor consistency across our approved delivery network and ensure the quality of the delivery of our qualifications

The Purpose of Carrying Out Monitoring Activities

Awarding Organisations play an important role in the concept, design, delivery, certification and review of regulated qualifications and have a duty to protect:

- ✓ The interests of the learner
- ✓ The integrity and reputation of the regulated qualifications framework
- ✓ The integrity and reputation of the Regulator

We can only complete our role by using a structured process of external monitoring activities providing insight into the operations of those that we approve to deliver our qualifications.

We operate a process of approving and monitoring centres who deliver our qualifications and, in doing so, gain assurance that a centre is able to complete the role they are delegated to undertake to a sufficient standard.

To support this, we make use of direct and indirect information in order to monitor the activities of those that we have approved through onsite visits, data and trend monitoring and market intelligence.

Who's Involved in Monitoring Activities

Many believe it is simply a matter of an external organisation turning up for one or two days to oversee what is happening and producing a report and then beginning the cycle again. It is much more than that and involves many more people, some more obvious than others.

Learners

Many think that as learners are those undertaking the qualification then they don't play an important role within the quality assurance process. In fact, they can play a vital part as they see first-hand what is actually happening.

They experience the learning journey, they know if and how they are being supported by the assessment team and they know whether they are being asked to do things that they shouldn't be doing.

They also play an important role in ensuring that the evidence they present to their Assessor is their own and a true reflection of what they are capable of demonstrating in terms of their knowledge and skills.

Through their honesty with their evidence and their willingness to talk to people about how they feel their learning journey is progressing, important information can be gleaned informing the continuous improvement cycle.

Assessors

Assessors are at the front of the assessment process and, as such, are the first line of quality assurance within the delivery of vocational qualifications. An Assessor undertakes the marking, reviewing and/or assessment of evidence produced by the learner.

This involves getting to know the learner and their style and capabilities, planning the generation of evidence with them and supporting its collection.

As an Assessor gets to know his/her learner, they will learn what style they write in, the types of wording they use, their abilities and knowledge. This is important information to ensure that they are able to make the following declaration when the time comes;

'I confirm that I have assessed all of the work produced and have ensured that the work is that of the learner. I have ensured that during the learning process the evidence is authentic, sufficient, valid and current to the standards required.'

Assessors also ensure that the assessment process runs according to the requirements of the centre they are employed by and, by virtue of this, the requirements of the Awarding Organisation and the Regulator.

They are often the first people to report problems or ask for advice from their Internal Quality Assurer to support the integrity of the delivery and certification of the qualification.

Internal Quality Assurers

Often seen as an extension of the Awarding Organisation's monitoring team, the Internal Quality Assurer has a vital role. They maintain and monitor the delivery and certification process and is the main contact between the centre and Awarding Organisation.

A strong and experienced Internal Quality Assurer should lead to a delivery and certification system that maintains the integrity of the qualification, provides a quality learning experience to the learner and continually looks at methods to improve delivery and share best practice.

Often when issues are found within the delivery and certification of qualifications within a centre, regardless of whether at learner or Assessor level, it can be traced back to a quality assurance system that does not have sufficient planning, oversight and impartiality to carry out its function.

Monitoring Officers

Often the eyes and ears of an Awarding Organisation, the Monitoring Officer upholds the standards required in the delivery and certification of qualifications.

Not only this but they also play a vital role in communicating messages between the Awarding Organisation and the centre and vice versa, often being the first people to hear of problems, issues, concerns and suggestions.

A further role the Monitoring Officer plays is in the standardisation of delivery and the sharing of best practice across their allocated centres and to others through the wider monitoring team at standardisation events held by the Awarding Organisation.

Awarding Organisation

The Awarding Organisation is ultimately responsible for the oversight and control of the concept and design, delivery, certification and review of qualifications that it is regulated to provide.

The Awarding Organisation works to maintain its regulatory duties by interpreting their meaning and producing operating procedures to ensure it can continually provide assurance that both it and its approved centres meet its core duties.

The Regulator

The Regulator, often constituted through statute, is charged with ensuring that the standard and confidence of qualifications within their region or country are maintained. This is often completed through much the same principle as that of an Awarding Organisation and its centres.

A Regulator issues conditions or principles of recognition that an Awarding Organisation must meet to gain approval as a regulated body and maintain to continue to operate under the recognition of the Regulator.

We currently work with Ofqual, Qualifications Wales the Scottish Qualifications Authority and CCEA.

Other External Stakeholders

There are often other external stakeholders that are involved in the quality assurance process.

In circumstances where public and/or private funding is being used there will often be oversight bodies who complete audits.

This can often provide intelligence to issues within centres as these audits highlight potential registration, delivery and/or certification issues that could impact on their operation as an approved centre.

Although the funding providers have no obligation to notify an Awarding Organisation of the outcome of an audit, they may choose to include an Awarding Organisation directly or indirectly, eg. through information submitted to the Personal Learning Record, in order to aid their activities.

Ofsted provides a further useful source of information as they provide an insight into the centre as a whole rather than in relation to the delivery of a particular qualification.

With their reports being publically available this can provide important information when either approving or monitoring the ongoing performance of a centre and highlight particular areas of concern that may need to be addressed in the delivery and certification of qualifications.

A further important method of communication between Awarding Organisations is the Event Notification, monitored by senior management, detailing circumstances of maladministration and malpractice within centres that are suspected to have caused adverse effects in the delivery of a qualification.

Types of Monitoring Activities

To support our role as an Awarding Organisation we conduct three types of monitoring activity, Approval, Standard and Additional monitoring.

Approval Activities

Within the vocational education environment, we operate a process of approving organisations to deliver qualifications and, in doing so, a training provider must meet the Core Principles and provide assurance that they will be able to complete the role they are delegated to undertake to a sufficient standard.

As a result of approval activities we will allocate a risk rating to a centre on the basis of both evidence seen and discussions held covering the ability to complete the role they are delegated to undertake.

If the centre meets all of the Core Principles, they will receive a **Blue** risk rating and a status of 'Approved'

If one of the Core Principle sub-sections is rated as **Green**, they will receive a **Green** risk rating and a status of 'Approved With Action Plan'

If one of the Core Principle sub-sections is rated as **Amber**, they will receive an **Amber** risk rating and a status of 'Further Information Requested'

If three or more of the Core Principle sub-sections are rated as **Amber**, they will receive a **Red** risk rating and a status of 'Approval Declined'

These risk ratings will support the Standard Monitoring activities that are completed going forward in order to support the continuous development and improvement of the delivery of our qualifications.

Where a centre has its approval declined, this does not mean a subsequent application cannot be made but the feedback received should be taken into account prior to submitting further applications.

Standard Monitoring Activities

Standard Monitoring activities aim to monitor the quality of the delivery of qualifications by a centre. This type of activity consists of system and folder samples and interviews followed by a report and action plans, as appropriate.

During Standard Monitoring activities our Monitoring Officers conduct a sample of folders that are in progress and also completed. The sample is selected on a 1 to 10 ratio although a greater selection can be taken to aid in the judgement made about how the centre is operating against the Core Principles.

We select folders from:

- ✓ Each of the Assessors and Internal Quality Assurers available
- ✓ Each of the delivery locations, where appropriate
- ✓ A representative percentage reflecting the diverse make up of learners in relation to gender, age, ethnicity, disability

This ensures that all members of staff involved in the delivery of SFEDI Awards qualifications are part of all monitoring activities and we can monitor the delivery of qualifications to minimise previously unforeseen access issues.

When we sample folders we are looking to ensure that the standards and requirements of the qualification have been met:

- ✓ Has the learner been registered on the Registr8 system within the 4-week rule?
- ✓ Have the Rules of Combination for the qualification been followed?
- ✓ Has the Assessor involved the learner in planning for what is required to undertake and complete the qualification?
- ✓ Has the Assessor updated those plans on an ongoing basis with the learner?
- ✓ Is there evidence of structured and meaningful feedback to the learner?
- ✓ Is there clear referencing/mapping of the evidence within the folder against the standards?
- ✓ Have any mandatory assessment methods been followed correctly?
- ✓ Is the evidence of sufficient quality and depth for the level of the qualification being undertaken?
- ✓ Are there suitable declarations by the Assessor and learner on completion of the qualification following requirements?
- ✓ Is there clear evidence of sampling by the Internal Quality Assurer present?
- ✓ Is there evidence of structured and meaningful feedback to the Assessor?
- ✓ Have any actions relating to the folder been identified and action planned as appropriate by the Internal Quality Assurer?
- ✓ Have any actions identified been signed off by the Assessor and the Internal Quality Assurer?
- ✓ Has the folder received a final sign off from the Internal Quality Assurer?
- ✓ Has the completed folder been claimed on the Registr8 system following sign off by the IQA?

We also select a minimum of one Assessor, one Internal Quality Assurer and one learner for interview as part of our sample.

When interviewing tutors and assessors we are looking to gain an insight into how they approach the assessment process and, as a guide, questions are framed around the subjects covered within Core Principles 7, 8 and 9.

When interviewing the Internal Quality Assurer, we are looking to gain assurance of the oversight and control mechanisms they have in place to ensure the continued integrity and quality of the delivery and certification process. As a guide, questions are framed around Core Principles 4, 6, 7 and 9.

When interviewing learners, we are looking to find out how involved they are in the planning and assessment process and also how supported they feel in working towards the achievement of their qualification. As a guide, questions are framed around the subjects covered within Core Principles 6, 7 and 8.

Following the Standard Monitoring activity, the centre receives a report providing thoughts on current practice and ideas for how continuous improvement can be promoted going forward.

Any action plans within the report include details about the:

- ✓ Responsible person
- ✓ Due date
- ✓ Reporting mechanism
- ✓ Relevant Core Principle, eg. 1.6
- ✓ Description of the action

Centres should fully read and ensure they understand the content of the report and any actions set as if they are not met then this could effect future risk ratings allocated.

On completion of a Standard Monitoring activity the centre is also allocated a risk rating, further information of which can be seen within Annex 1 of this guide:

A risk rating is allocated to each sub-section, as seen in Annex 2 of this guide, within the Core Principles according to the potential effect that not meeting that particular requirement could have on both the delivery and certification of the qualification or on the learners themselves.

A guide to what the different levels of risk mean and the actions that result from a centre being awarded a risk rating can be seen within Annex 1 of this guide.

If the centre meets all of the Core Principles, they will receive a **Blue** risk rating

If one of the Core Principle sub-sections is rated as **Green**, they will receive a **Green** risk rating

If one of the Core Principle sub-sections is rated as **Amber**, they will receive an **Amber** risk rating

If three or more of the Core Principle sub-sections are rated as **Amber**, they will receive a **Red** risk rating

Additional Monitoring Activities

Additional Monitoring activities can result from:

- ✓ The production of an action plan as a result of a Standard Monitoring activity
- ✓ Information received from qualification users, eg. through appeals, complaints, whistleblowing
- ✓ Information received from other Awarding Organisations through intelligence sharing
- ✓ Information received from the Regulator or other government bodies
- ✓ Market intelligence from other sources, eg. news outlets

As a result, Additional Monitoring activities cannot always be pre-planned as it often occurs as a response to unforeseen circumstances.

These activities could lead to the risk rating allocated to a centre being increased, or decreased, as a result of the information gathered.

If a risk rating is increased or decreased as a result of Additional Monitoring activities, we will write to the centre to inform them of their new risk rating and its effective from date.

It may not always be possible to inform the centre of the reasons why the risk rating has been altered dependent on the reasons for the change being made.

Where the Additional Monitoring activity is completed as a result of an action plan being set, these will be followed up based on the allocated target dates.

Where a centre has not addressed **Green** risk rated actions on two consecutive occasions, the risk rating will be raised to **Amber**.

Where a centre has not addressed **Amber** risk rated actions on two consecutive occasions, the risk rating will be raised to **Red**.

Where a centre has not addressed **Red** risk rated actions within three months, the risk rating will be raised to **Black**.

What if a centre does not agree with the findings of the monitoring activities?

If a centre does not agree with the findings of monitoring activities conducted or the risk rating that has been allocated it is important to highlight this to SFEDI Awards straightaway as we always welcome the opportunity to discuss this.

In the first instance, contact should be through the Assurance team on assurance@sfediawards.com to discuss any concerns as on many occasions issues can be resolved simply and quickly.

If a centre is still unsatisfied by the findings, they have the right to access the SFEDI Awards appeals procedure, details of which can be seen on our website.

Annex 1

We operate a five stage risk rating system allowing us to categorise the findings of monitoring activities and also provide both targeted and appropriate support to members of our approved delivery network.

The ratings we use are:

Blue

Description:

No issue identified

Actions:

No action required, the centre will be visited on a 12-monthly basis and can be considered for the awarding of Direct Claims Status (DCS) for qualifications

Green

Description:

Minor procedural, policy or resource issue identified resulting in a minimum of one Core Principle sub-section with a risk rating of Green

Actions:

Action plan set, the centre will be visited on a 12-monthly basis with additional monitoring activities to progress the actions set. The centre can be considered for the awarding of Direct Claims Status (DCS) for qualifications

Amber

Description:

Issue identified resulting in the potential or actual disadvantage of a learner or a significant procedural or policy issue identified resulting in a minimum of one Core Principle sub-section with a risk rating of Amber, or
Failure to address actions with a risk rating of Green on two or more occasions

Actions:

Action plan set, the centre will be visited on a 6-monthly basis with additional monitoring activities to progress the actions set. The centre cannot be considered for the awarding of Direct Claims Status (DCS) for qualifications. Consideration under the Event Notification procedure.

Red

Description:

Issue identified resulting in the breakdown of the integrity and/or safety of a qualification or learner, or

A minimum of three Core Principle sub-sections with a risk rating of Amber, or
Failure to address actions with a risk rating of Amber on two or more occasions

Actions:

Action plan set, the centre will be visited on a 3-monthly basis with additional monitoring activities to progress the actions set. The centre cannot be considered for the awarding of Direct Claims Status (DCS) for qualifications and the ability to register learners will be removed. Consideration under the Event Notification procedure.

Black

Description:

Issue identified resulting in the breakdown of the integrity and/or safety of multiple qualifications or learners, or

Failure to address actions with a risk rating of Red within 3 months

Actions:

Action plan set, the centre will be visited on a 3-monthly basis with additional monitoring activities to support the completion of existing learner qualifications, if appropriate. The centre cannot be considered for the awarding of Direct Claims Status (DCS) for qualifications. Removal of centre approved status and the ability to register new learners. Consideration under the Event Notification procedure.

Annex 2

The following provides the risk ratings allocated to each of the sub-sections of the nine Core Principles used by SFEDI Awards to monitor the consistency and quality of qualification delivery across our approved delivery network.

PRINCIPLE 1 SFEDI AWARDS CENTRES HAVE APPROPRIATE OPERATING PROCEDURES TO ENSURE THEY ARE SUSTAINABLE AND ABLE TO RESPOND TO MARKET NEEDS AND CHANGES	Allocated Risk Rating
1.1 Does the organisation have and use a business plan to aid sustainability and growth	Green
1.2 Does the organisation use financial management systems that enables the organisation to make timely payment of invoices	Green
1.3 Does the organisation identify and respond to changes in the market, eg. funding, legislation, competitor activity	Green
1.4 Does the organisation have a clear managerial and staffing structure and lines of communication between all levels of management and staff	Green
1.5 Does the organisation have clear aims and policies for the operation of the organisation which are understood by the delivery and quality assurance staff and supported by senior management	Green
1.6 Does the organisation have a staff development programme, linked to a staff performance management system, that is established for the assessment and quality assurance team in line with identified needs	Green
1.7 Does the organisation have arrangements to ensure that it retains at all times a workforce of appropriate size and competence for the delivery of its products and services including the qualification(s) applied for in this application form	Amber
1.8 Does the organisation actively promote and abide by an equal opportunities strategy for staff members that meets local statutory requirements	Green
1.9 Does the organisation collect and use feedback from learners, staff and stakeholders and use this to enhance the services offered within a continuous improvement cycle	Green

PRINCIPLE 2 SFEDI AWARDS CENTRES HAVE FIT FOR PURPOSE TRAINING FACILITIES AND HIGH QUALITY TRAINING MATERIALS TO SUPPORT THE DELIVERY OF QUALIFICATIONS	Allocated Risk Rating
2.1 Does the organisation have training areas that are in a good state of repair and clean	Green
2.2 Does the organisation have an adequate number of training rooms of appropriate size to provide for the size of cohorts anticipated for the qualification(s) applied for in this application	Green
2.3 Does the organisation have up to date ICT facilities with appropriate internet access to allow for the delivery of the qualification(s) applied for in this application	Green
2.4 Does the organisation have delivery locations that satisfy local statutory health, safety and fire regulations	Amber
2.5 Does the organisation have the necessary training, assessment and quality assurance resources in order to deliver the programmes effectively	Amber

PRINCIPLE 3 SFEDI AWARDS CENTRES UPHOLD DATA PROTECTION REQUIREMENTS TO PROTECT LEARNER INFORMATION	Allocated Risk Rating
3.1 Is the organisation registered with the Information Commissioner's Office	Green
3.2 If registration with the Information Commissioner's Office is not in place, is it a requirement for the organisation and if so what is the date the application will be made	Green
3.3 Does the organisation collect and hold learner personal data in accordance with data protection legislation, including the Data Protection Act 1998 and are such records held with the explicit consent of the learner (if the organisation does not currently have any learners how do they propose to do this)	Amber
3.4 Does the organisation have in place arrangements for the receipt and secure storage of assessment materials, coursework and other learner work as well as learner certificates	Green

PRINCIPLE 4 SFEDI AWARDS CENTRES REGISTER LEARNERS FOR QUALIFICATIONS AND CLAIM FOR CERTIFICATION TIMELY SO AS NOT TO DISADVANTAGE THE LEARNER	Allocated Risk Rating
4.1 Does the organisation have appropriate arrangements to allow for the accurate registration and certification of learners within the 4 week rule and are these shared and understood by all team members within all delivery locations	Green
4.2 Does the organisation have a point of contact for the registration and certification of learners	Green
4.3 Does the organisation have arrangements in place to obtain, on behalf of the learner, a Unique Learner Number to be provided to SFEDI Awards as part of the registration process	Green

PRINCIPLE 5 SFEDI AWARDS CENTRES MARKET AND PROMOTE QUALIFICATIONS APPROPRIATELY TO LEARNERS AND THE MARKETPLACE	Allocated Risk Rating
5.1 Does the organisation have a marketing and promotional plan in order to aid the recruitment of learners to the qualification(s) applied for in this application	Green
5.2 Does the organisation have arrangements in place to ensure they are able to meet the requirements of the SFEDI Awards Qualification Titling in Marketing and Logo Usage policy	Green

PRINCIPLE 6 SFEDI AWARDS CENTRES DEMONSTRATE A BELIEF IN THE SAFETY AND WELFARE OF THEIR LEARNERS	Allocated Risk Rating
<p>6.1 Does the organisation have the following in place where required:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Child protection policy (under 16s) b) Staff list recording DBS Standard, Enhanced, Enhanced with list checks (under 18s and vulnerable adults) 	Amber
<p>6.2 If DBS checks are not required then how does the organisation ensure that the staff employed are at all times suitable to be engaged in their role within a training environment</p>	Amber
<p>6.3 Does the organisation make provision for learners with special requirements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Learning needs b) Medical needs c) Physical needs 	Amber
<p>6.4 Does the organisation have wheelchair access to all essential parts of the premises</p>	Amber
<p>6.5 Does the organisation have a disability strategy in place</p>	Green
<p>6.6 Does the organisation provide the opportunity for learners to declare special learning, medical or physical needs or the option not to declare</p>	Amber
<p>6.7 Does the organisation have in place and actively promote an equal opportunities strategy for learners that meets local statutory requirements</p>	Green

PRINCIPLE 7 SFEDI AWARDS CENTRES PROVIDE ACCURATE INFORMATION TO LEARNERS SO THEY ARE AWARE OF THEIR RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES THROUGHOUT THE LEARNING EXPERIENCE	Allocated Risk Rating
7.1 Does the organisation provide clear information, advice and guidance about programmes, procedures and practices to learners and potential learners	Green
7.2 Does the information supplied to learners include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Course description b) Assessment requirements c) Quality assurance requirements d) Timebound appeals strategy e) Timebound complaints strategy f) Whistleblowing strategy g) Document retention requirements h) Reasonable adjustments and special considerations strategy i) Information regarding the Awarding Organisation j) Information regarding the Regulator 	Green
7.3 Does the information supplied to staff include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Strategy for the conduct of assessments b) Strategy for the conduct of quality assurance c) Timebound appeals strategy d) Timebound complaints strategy e) Whistleblowing strategy f) Document retention requirements g) Information regarding the Awarding Organisation h) Information regarding the Regulator 	Green
7.4 Does the organisation provide information as to potential progression routes that learners could take advantage of on the achievement of their qualification	Green

PRINCIPLE 8 SFEDI AWARDS CENTRES PROVIDE HIGH QUALITY AND VARIED ASSESSMENT OPPORTUNITIES TO APPROPRIATELY MEET THE NEEDS OF LEARNERS	Allocated Risk Rating
8.1 Does the organisation makes available unit certification as well as qualification certification	Green
8.2 Does the organisation have resources and systems necessary to support the assessment of units and the award, accumulation and transfer of credits and, where necessary, the recording of exemptions	Green
8.3 Does the organisation encourage access to assessment through the use of a range of valid assessment methods	Green
8.4 Does the organisation identify particular assessment requirements of learners and meet them where possible	Amber
8.5 Does the organisation provide assessment personnel with sufficient time, resources and authority to perform their duties in a manner appropriate to ensure the continued validity and safety of qualifications	Amber
8.6 Does the organisation have in place a mechanism to allow learners to review their progress and continuously plan for the next steps to be taken in order to aid the achievement of a unit or qualification	Green
8.7 Does the organisation have in place a conflict of interest strategy that details all steps to be taken to ensure that any part of the assessment of a learner is not undertaken by any person who has a personal interest in the result of the assessment	Amber
8.8 Does the organisation have a retention strategy for assessment materials, coursework and other learner work as well as assessment documentation	Green

PRINCIPLE 9 SFEDI AWARDS CENTRES MAINTAIN HIGH QUALITY ASSURANCE PRACTICES TO MAINTAIN THE SAFETY, INTEGRITY AND REPUTATION OF THE QUALIFICATION FRAMEWORK	Allocated Risk Rating
9.1 Does the organisation have in place appropriate strategy to detect and deal with instances of maladministration and malpractice	Amber
9.2 Does the organisation have in place an appropriate strategy to notify SFEDI Awards of unforeseen events that may have caused or have the potential to cause an adverse effect in the delivery and/or safety of a qualification	Amber
9.3 Does the organisation provide quality assurance personnel with sufficient time, resources and authority to perform their duties in an independent manner to ensure the continued assurance of the delivery of qualifications	Amber
9.4 Does the organisation have a sampling strategy to aid the continued assurance of the delivery of qualifications	Amber
9.5 Does the organisation have an observation strategy in order to ensure the continued quality of the delivery of qualifications	Green
9.6 Does the organisation have an appropriate strategy in place to allow for standardisation activities to ensure consistency of delivery across the delivery and quality assurance teams	Green
9.7 Does the organisation have effective communication between the assessment and quality assurance team and SFEDI Awards	Green
9.8 Does the organisation have in place a conflict of interest strategy that details all steps to be taken to ensure that any part of the quality assurance of a learner is not undertaken by any person who has a personal interest in the result of the outcome	Amber
9.9 Does the organisation have in place a whistleblowing strategy that also clearly references the Awarding Organisation and appropriate qualification Regulator(s) for use by both staff and learners	Green
9.10 Does the organisation give an undertaking to allow access to all premises, records, resources and personnel involved in the delivery of qualifications at the request of SFEDI Awards or the Regulator at any time in order to allow the completion of quality assurance processes	Amber

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