



Direct Claims Status (DCS) Policy

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Introduction

This policy sets out the principles and requirements for the award, monitoring, maintenance, suspension and withdrawal of Direct Claims Status (DCS) by Focus Awards.

Direct Claims Status is awarded to centres that consistently demonstrate high standards of assessment, internal quality assurance and regulatory compliance. It enables approved centres to claim learner certificates without prior approval from an External Quality Assurer (EQA) for specified qualifications.

This policy applies to all centres that hold, are applying for, or have previously held Direct Claims Status and should be read alongside other relevant Focus Awards policies and regulatory requirements.

Achieving DCS

To be considered for Direct Claims Status (DCS), the Centre must demonstrate consistent compliance with Focus Awards' quality assurance requirements by achieving two consecutive successful EQA reviews within a maximum period of 18 months.

The most recent EQA review must:

- have no outstanding actions from the previous EQA report or sampling activities;
- include a minimum sample of 20 learners, of which at least 15 must be summative;
- confirm that all sampled learners have been appropriately assessed and internally quality assured; and
- demonstrate continued compliance with Focus Awards' quality assurance requirements.
- demonstrate a consistent record of submitting all required programme notifications accurately and within the required timescales.

Following a successful review, the EQA will submit a recommendation for the award of DCS. The recommendation will be reviewed by the Quality Assurance Manager, who will determine whether DCS should be approved.

Focus Awards will not award Direct Claims Status for Business Administration qualifications.

Achieving DCS for the Level 5 Diploma in Aesthetic Practice

In addition to the standard Direct Claims Status (DCS) requirements, the Focus Awards Level 5 Diploma in Aesthetic Practice (RQF) is subject to enhanced quality assurance arrangements due to the nature of the qualification and associated regulatory risks.

Prior to DCS being considered, the Centre must successfully complete an EQA visit, including observation of delivery, and 100% of certificated learners must be sampled. DCS will only be considered where the EQA is satisfied that assessment decisions are valid, internal quality assurance arrangements are effective, and all regulatory and Focus Awards requirements

have been consistently met.

Following certification, the frequency and level of ongoing sampling will be determined by the Centre's risk rating and may be increased at any time where concerns are identified.

In addition to the standard DCS criteria, the Centre must demonstrate that:

- all staff involved in the delivery, assessment and internal quality assurance of the qualification are appropriately regulated medical professionals (for example, registered nurse prescribers) and have demonstrable experience of delivering the qualification with Focus Awards or another recognised awarding organisation;
- programme notifications are submitted to Focus Awards accurately and within the required timescales for every planned cohort or delivery;
- learner registrations, programme notifications and certification claims consistently reflect the actual delivery taking place; and
- no significant quality assurance, compliance or regulatory concerns have been identified.

Failure to meet any of the above requirements may result in Direct Claims Status not being awarded, or where already awarded, being suspended or withdrawn.

Maintaining DCS

Following the award of Direct Claims Status (DCS), the Centre must continue to maintain the high standards of assessment, internal quality assurance and regulatory compliance that led to its approval.

DCS is formally reviewed at least annually. To retain DCS, the Centre must:

- have no outstanding actions from EQA monitoring or sampling reports;
- demonstrate effective assessment and internal quality assurance arrangements; and
- continue to meet all Focus Awards quality assurance requirements.

The Centre must retain learner assessment records in accordance with the Retention of Learner Records Policy. A sample of completed learner portfolios must be available for review by the External Quality Assurer (EQA). Prior to each monitoring activity, the EQA will issue a sampling plan, which will include at least one completed learner for each qualification holding DCS.

In addition to the annual review, Focus Awards will undertake ongoing, risk-based monitoring. The frequency of EQA sampling may be monthly, quarterly, bi-annually or annually, depending on factors including certification volumes, previous quality assurance outcomes, identified risks, or concerns raised by Focus Awards or third parties.

DCS will expire on the anniversary of its award if an annual review has not been completed. Where DCS expires, the Centre must successfully complete the DCS approval process before

it can be reinstated.

Focus Awards reserves the right to suspend or withdraw DCS at any time where the Centre no longer meets the required standards or where concerns arise through monitoring activities, complaints, malpractice investigations, regulatory action or any other quality assurance intelligence. Where appropriate, the Centre will be informed of the concerns and the actions required.

Management Changes

The Centre must notify Focus Awards immediately of any changes to its organisational structure that may affect the delivery or quality assurance of qualifications. This includes, but is not limited to, changes to Assessors, Internal Quality Assurers (IQAs), senior management, directors or other key personnel.

Where such changes occur, Focus Awards may undertake a review of the Centre's Direct Claims Status (DCS) to ensure that the requirements for DCS continue to be met and that robust assessment and internal quality assurance arrangements remain in place.

Failure to notify Focus Awards of relevant organisational changes may result in Direct Claims Status being suspended or withdrawn for the affected qualification(s) with immediate effect, pending further review

Sharing of Learner Work

To enable Focus Awards to carry out external quality assurance, Centres must provide secure electronic access to learner portfolios, assessment records, assessor feedback and internal quality assurance (IQA) records.

Access must be provided through the Centre's chosen secure platform (for example, OneDrive, Google Drive, Dropbox, SharePoint or a Virtual Learning Environment (VLE)) and must be available for all learners registered with Focus Awards.

Centres must ensure that Focus Awards' External Quality Assurers (EQAs) are provided with appropriate read-only access for the duration of quality assurance activities. It is the Centre's responsibility to ensure access is available when requested and that all records are complete, accurate and accessible.

Failure to provide access within the required timescales may delay certification and may result in increased monitoring, suspension or withdrawal of Direct Claims Status (DCS).

Access and GDPR

Access to learner information will be limited to authorised Focus Awards personnel involved in quality assurance, certification, compliance and investigations.

Where required, learner information may also be shared with regulatory or enforcement bodies, including Ofqual, the Department for Education, law enforcement agencies or any other organisation where Focus Awards has a legal or regulatory obligation to do so.

Focus Awards processes personal data in accordance with UK GDPR and the Data Protection Act 2018.

Learner information will only be used for assessment, certification, quality assurance and regulatory purposes.

Data minimisation:

Focus Awards will only request, access and retain the information necessary to undertake quality assurance, certification and regulatory activities.

This may include:

- learner name and registration details (including ULN where applicable);
- date of birth and contact details where required;
- assessment evidence and learner portfolios;
- assessor and IQA records;
- assessment decisions and feedback.

Personal data will be processed and retained in accordance with the Focus Awards Privacy Notice and Retention of Learner Records Policy.

Transferring DCS

Where a Centre has been awarded Direct Claims Status (DCS) for an equivalent qualification by another recognised awarding organisation, Focus Awards may, at its discretion, consider transferring that status.

To be considered, the Centre must:

- provide a copy of the most recent EQA report, completed within the previous 12 months, confirming that DCS has been awarded;
- complete the Focus Awards DCS Transfer Validation Form (Appendix); and
- authorise Focus Awards to verify the DCS status directly with the previous awarding organisation.

Transfer of DCS is not automatic. Before DCS is granted, Focus Awards will undertake an initial quality assurance review, including the sampling of a minimum of five completed learner portfolios for the relevant qualification.

Where the sampling activity confirms that assessment decisions and internal quality assurance arrangements meet Focus Awards' requirements, Direct Claims Status may be awarded. Once approved, the Centre must continue to meet all requirements set out in the Maintaining Direct Claims Status section of this policy.

Focus Awards reserves the right to refuse the transfer of DCS where concerns are identified, where sufficient evidence is not available, or where the qualification or Centre presents an increased level of regulatory or quality assurance risk.

Suspension of Direct Claims Status (DCS)

Focus Awards reserves the right to suspend Direct Claims Status (DCS) at any time where there is reasonable concern that the Centre no longer meets the requirements of this policy or where the integrity of assessment or certification may be at risk.

DCS may be suspended where, including but not limited to:

- significant actions remain outstanding following EQA activity;
- concerns are identified through monitoring, sampling or programme notifications;
- the Centre fails to cooperate with Focus Awards quality assurance activities;
- changes to staffing or management have not been notified to Focus Awards;
- malpractice, maladministration or regulatory concerns are identified or suspected; or
- there is any other risk that could affect the validity or integrity of certification.

Whilst DCS is suspended, all certification claims must receive prior approval from Focus Awards before certificates are released. Suspension will remain in place until Focus Awards is satisfied that all identified concerns have been addressed.

Withdrawal of Direct Claims Status (DCS)

Focus Awards may withdraw Direct Claims Status where a Centre fails to maintain the standards required under this policy or where significant or repeated quality assurance concerns are identified.

DCS may be withdrawn where:

- corrective actions have not been completed within the required timescales;
- repeated non-compliance is identified through EQA activity;
- malpractice or maladministration has been substantiated;
- the Centre fails to provide access to learner evidence or quality assurance records;
- programme notifications or learner registrations are consistently inaccurate or not submitted within the required timescales; or
- the Centre no longer demonstrates effective assessment or internal quality assurance arrangements.

Where DCS is withdrawn, all future certification claims will require prior approval from Focus

Awards. The Centre will only be considered for reinstatement after demonstrating sustained compliance with the requirements of this policy and successfully completing the DCS approval process.

Appeals

A Centre that disagrees with a decision to refuse, suspend or withdraw Direct Claims Status may submit an appeal in accordance with the Focus Awards Appeals Policy.

Appeals must be supported by appropriate evidence demonstrating why the decision should be reconsidered. The submission of an appeal does not automatically reinstate DCS, and any suspension or withdrawal will remain in place until the appeal has been determined. The outcome of the appeal will be communicated to the Centre in writing.

Centre Responsibilities

Centres awarded Direct Claims Status remain responsible for ensuring that all assessment and quality assurance activities continue to meet the requirements of Focus Awards and applicable regulatory conditions.

The Centre must:

- maintain robust assessment and internal quality assurance arrangements;
- ensure all learner registrations, programme notifications and certification claims are accurate and submitted within the required timescales;
- notify Focus Awards immediately of changes to key personnel, organisational structure or delivery arrangements;
- retain learner records in accordance with the Retention of Learner Records Policy;
- provide Focus Awards with timely access to learner evidence, assessment records and quality assurance documentation;
- cooperate fully with all quality assurance, monitoring and investigation activities;
- promptly address any actions identified through EQA activity or other monitoring; and
- continue to comply with the Centre Agreement, qualification requirements and all relevant Focus Awards policies.

Failure to fulfil these responsibilities may result in additional monitoring, suspension or withdrawal of Direct Claims Status.

Policy Review

This policy will be reviewed annually to ensure it remains current, effective and compliant with regulatory requirements, legislation and Focus Awards' quality assurance arrangements.

Focus Awards reserves the right to review and amend this policy at any time where required, including in response to changes in legislation, regulatory requirements, operational practices or identified risks. Any revisions will be approved through the

appropriate governance process and communicated to Centres where applicable.

DCS FAQ's

Can we have DCS?

Direct Claims Status (DCS) cannot be requested by a Centre. It is a quality assurance privilege awarded by Focus Awards to Centres that consistently demonstrate high standards of assessment, internal quality assurance and regulatory compliance.

To be considered for DCS, the Centre must meet all the requirements outlined in this policy. The length of time a Centre has been approved does not influence eligibility.

Can DCS be suspended or withdrawn?

Yes. DCS may be suspended or withdrawn where a Centre no longer meets the requirements of this policy or where there are concerns regarding assessment, quality assurance or regulatory compliance.

Reasons may include, but are not limited to:

- significant changes to key personnel or management;
- malpractice or maladministration concerns;
- investigations by Focus Awards or another awarding organisation;
- failure to cooperate with quality assurance activities;
- failure to provide requested information or learner evidence;
- non-compliance with Focus Awards policies or the Centre Agreement; or
- outstanding fees or persistent late payment.

Where appropriate, Focus Awards will notify the Centre of any concerns and the actions required.

If DCS is withdrawn, can it be regained?

Yes. Where DCS has been withdrawn, the Centre must successfully meet the current DCS approval requirements before it can be reinstated. This will normally include demonstrating sustained compliance through consecutive successful EQA reviews in accordance with this policy.

How many learners will be sampled?

The number of learners sampled will depend on the qualification, the Centre's risk rating and the purpose of the quality assurance activity.

For DCS approval, the minimum sampling requirements set out within this policy must be met. Focus Awards reserves the right to increase sampling where additional assurance is required.

Will our Centre still be sampled after DCS has been awarded?

Yes. Awarding DCS does not remove the requirement for ongoing external quality assurance.

Focus Awards will continue to undertake sampling and monitoring to ensure assessment decisions remain valid and quality standards continue to be met. Sampling may take place during scheduled EQA activities or at any other time where additional assurance is required.

Where a learner has been identified as a declared conflict of interest, additional sampling may also be required.

What may trigger additional sampling?

Additional sampling may be carried out where Focus Awards identifies an increased level of risk. This may include:

- whistleblowing disclosures or complaints;
- suspected or confirmed malpractice or maladministration;
- concerns identified through EQA activities or monitoring;
- significant increases in learner registrations or certification activity;
- programme notification or compliance concerns;
- regulatory requirements or awarding organisation quality assurance activities; or
- any other circumstance where Focus Awards considers additional assurance to be necessary.

Who should I contact if I have questions about DCS?

If you require further information about Direct Claims Status or this policy, please contact your External Quality Assurer (EQA) or the Focus Awards Quality Assurance Team.

Contact us

If you have any queries about the contents of the policy, please contact our support team

E: info@focusawards.org.uk

T: +44(0)333 3447 388

Version History

The version history for this policy is maintained within the Focus Awards Policy Document Control List.

Appendix

Permission to Validate Direct Claims Status (DCS) for Transfer

Prior to Direct Claims Status (DCS) being transferred and applied to any Focus Awards qualifications, you permission will be required to enable Focus Awards to validate the Direct Claims Status (DCS) with the Awarding Body/Organisation.

Name:		Date:	
Position Held:			
Centre Name:			
Registered Address:			
Correspondence Address: (if different from above)			
AO DCS currently held with:		Date DCS awarded:	
Declaration: I provide Focus Awards with permission to validate Direct Claims Status (DCS) that has been awarded by the Awarding Body/Organisation named above, to transfer DCS across to Focus Awards. I understand: • Transferring Direct Claims Status (DCS) is not guaranteed, and Focus Awards reserve the right to not transfer Direct Claims Status (DCS) and apply this to their qualifications. • Prior to Direct Claims Status (DCS) being fully transferred we will be required to submit a batch of portfolios for sampling and upon successful completion Direct Claims Status (DCS) may be applied. • Any associated fees that may be involved in verification including those of initial sampling. • Direct Claims Status (DCS) will be reviewed regularly and in line with the Focus Awards 'Direct Claims Status (DCS) Policy' • As part of the transfer I will be required to provide a copy of an EQA monitoring report issued by the Awarding Body/Organisation within the last 12 month			
Signed:			