



Focus Awards Guidance for Internal Quality Assurance

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Introduction

The Guidance for Focus Awards Internal Quality Assurance (IQA) Policy provides clear and practical guidance for centres to ensure that the delivery and assessment of qualifications meet the required standards of quality and compliance. Internal quality assurance is a vital process that underpins the integrity, reliability, and fairness of the qualifications awarded. This policy outlines the key responsibilities of the Internal Quality Assurer, the development of an IQA strategy, and the procedures to effectively monitor and support assessors and tutors. By following this guidance, centres can maintain consistent assessment practices, ensure the credibility of learner achievements, and meet the expectations of Focus Awards.

The role of an Internal Quality Assurer

Internal Quality Assurance is a key mechanism that every Centre must have in place to ensure that Focus Awards qualifications are being delivered in line with our requirements. Below is what the role of the Internal Quality Assurer (IQA) should entail:

The role of the IQA:

- to carry out and evaluate internal assessment and quality assurance systems;
- to support assessors/tutors;
- monitor the quality of assessor/tutor performance;
- meet external quality assurance requirements.

Internal Quality Assurance Strategy

An Internal Quality Assurance strategy should be the first thing implemented within your Centre by the IQA. It will give an overview of what the IQA procedures will be for your Centre.

An IQA strategy should include the following:

- how the IQA will verify assessment practices;
- how the IQA will develop and support assessors;
- how the IQA will monitor delivery of programmes.

Don't worry if you have never written a strategy like this before, we can provide you with an example strategy that you can use and adapt for your Centre.

The IQA should then set up an Internal Quality Assurance file (electronic or hard file) that has all necessary information regarding the assessors they support, and to store all the completed paperwork.

A typical Internal Quality Assurance file should include the following:

- Record of assessor induction;
- CV's, certificates and specimen signatures for all tutors/assessors;
- Evidence of recorded CPD for all tutors/assessors;
- Evidence of Internal Quality Assurance that has taken place;
- Previous EQA reports;
- Evidence of meetings/training/standardisation;
- Evidence of any reasonable adjustments that have taken place;
- Evidence of additional support that has taken place;

- Evidence of any exemption, equivalence, credit transfer or RPL decisions that have been made;
- Progress reports;
- Learner interviews;

Carrying out Internal Quality Assurance (guidance for the IQA)

Internal Quality Assurance rarely works well with a “one size fits all approach” and it is the IQA’s responsibility to decide how to apportion their time to meet the needs of the learners and tutors/assessors.

As the IQA you should plan to regularly monitor the activities your assessors carry out, along with the decisions they make. This is to ensure they are performing their job role correctly and not disadvantaging their learners in any way.

When planning the activities you will carry out, you should record a rationale and base this on the risk factors you have identified in your strategy, for example the experience of your assessors or any problem units you have identified which could cause concern.

The rationale can be recorded on the IQA assessor sampling rationale form and you can then detail what you are going to sample.

For example; an assessor that has only just started assessing will need more guidance and support than an assessor who has been performing their role competently for the last 3 years.

Activities that you should plan to carry out include:

- observing assessor practice;
- talking to learners;
- sampling assessed learners' work and assessment records;
- arranging team meetings;
- arranging standardisation activities.
- Supporting and providing developmental and fair feedback to assessors
- Cascading any EQA feedback from sampling and EQA monitoring visits

The role of an IQA is not to simply re-mark learner work, you must review the assessor performance, providing feedback.

You should always keep records of any activity you carry out for audit purposes. When completing any records, if signatures are required but cannot be applied on the day, these should be obtained as soon as possible after the event. Any signatures added later should have the date they were added, rather than the date the form was originally completed. If you are completing documents electronically, ideally an electronic signature should be obtained. If this is not possible, there must be evidence that the assessor has agreed your IQA report via email.

How to write a Rationale

When writing a rationale, you should firstly consider the experience level of the tutor/assessor(s) that will be delivering/assessing the qualification and decide how much programme delivery/ assessment you need to see based on the tutor/assessor’s experience.

For example, if an experienced tutor is delivering the course, you may only plan to observe their delivery once throughout the course. If an inexperienced tutor is delivering the course, you may plan to observe their delivery 2-3 times on the course. This would be exactly the same for an experienced assessor, as you

may choose to observe their assessment practices twice per year and sample a relatively low percentage of their portfolios (as a guide 25 – 30%). Therefore, an inexperienced assessor may be observed every 1-2 months and have 100% of their portfolios sampled to start with. As they grow in confidence and competence, you may decide to reduce this.

Once you have decided on this, you will need to write a rationale based on these thoughts.

Here are some examples:

Inexperienced tutor – Liz is a qualified tutor but inexperienced in teaching this qualification so she is a qualified but an inexperienced tutor. Therefore, I will observe Liz on 2 occasions per course and I will interview 40% of the learners

Inexperienced assessor – Barry is a qualified assessor but has only been assessing for a couple of months so is an inexperienced assessor. I am going to sample 100% of the learner portfolios for each cohort and I will ensure when doing this that I sample all evidence across all units with one learner receiving a 100% sample. I will ensure that I sample formatively (early and mid-programme) and summatively. I will also observe Barry carrying out an assessment once per month; progressing to every two months once I am happy that his assessment practices are improving.

Observing assessor practice

A good way to ensure your assessors are performing adequately is to see them in action. Not only will this give you the opportunity to see them making assessment decisions, but you will also be able to talk to their learners afterwards. Documenting your observations will help to ensure you remain objective when making decisions regarding your assessor's competence.

When arranging to carry out an observation, you will need to make sure the learner is aware that you are observing not them but their assessor. Your assessor, and indeed their learner, might be nervous about being observed. You will need to try to put them at ease, and explain you are there to help and support, not to be critical of them. You need to ensure your assessor is performing their job role correctly and making valid and reliable assessment decisions. You also need to check that the area is safe and that any resources used are appropriate.

Talking to learners

After observing your assessor, it is an ideal time to talk to their learner and gain feedback regarding the assessment process (a checklist can be used for this purpose). Always give the learner the opportunity to ask you any questions and to discuss any aspects of the assessment and IQA process with you. If you are not able to answer any questions from the learner, make sure you find out and then get back to them. Thank the learner for their time and wish them well with their future progress. Don't be tempted to tell them anything about their assessor's performance or make excuses for any problems. You can then give feedback to your assessor away from their learner. This should take place as soon as possible after the observation and in an appropriate location. If you or the assessor has any other commitments at the time, a quick verbal account can be given and then a date and time arranged for formal feedback.

It could be that you identify some areas for development, in which case you will discuss this sensitively with your assessor and reach an agreement on how to proceed. You should always follow up any action points you set to ensure they have been met, and then update the observation checklist accordingly.

Sampling assessed learners' work and assessment records

An excellent way of monitoring assessor practice and decisions is to sample the learners' work they have assessed, along with the assessment records. You should have a plan to show what you will sample, from whom and when (this can be recorded on the IQA Portfolio Sampling Plan).

This should be on a formative (interim) and summative basis; formative is part way through each learner's progress and summative (sometimes called 'end-loaded') is at the completion stage. If a problem is identified at the interim stage there is a chance to put it right. Interim sampling can look at aspects of assessment and learner evidence. Summative sampling can check that the full assessment process has been completed successfully and that all documents are complete.

The benefits of interim sampling are that it gives opportunities to monitor:

- all assessment types and methods, whether they are safe, valid, fair and reliable;
- consistency of decisions between assessors;
- consistency of assessor interpretation of what is being assessed;
- good practice that can be shared between assessors;
- how assessors are completing their records;
- how effective assessment planning is;
- how effective feedback to learners is;
- how learners are progressing and what has been achieved;
- if assessors need any support or further training;
- if learners need any support or have any particular requirements;
- if there are any problems that need addressing before the learner completes;
- the views of others, for example learners, employers and witnesses;
- whether the learner has been registered with Focus Awards.

The benefits of summative sampling are that it gives opportunities to check:

- all documents are fully completed;
- all requirements have been met enabling certificates to be claimed (if applicable);
- assessors have implemented any action points;
- the assessment decisions are correct;
- the learner evidence is VACSR;
- there are adequate assessment plans and feedback records.

Arranging team meetings

You should have a plan to reflect when you will hold meetings with your team of assessors. If you plan the dates a year in advance, this will ensure everyone knows when they will take place and therefore will be able to attend. If you have a large team, you could hold a meeting every month, or less often if your teams are smaller. An agenda (see Appendix 4 - example IQA standardisation agenda) should be formulated to ensure all important aspects of the assessment and IQA process are covered. The agenda could be circulated in advance by e-mail or be uploaded to your organisation's intranet. It might be your responsibility to chair the meeting and take minutes. If so, try to produce them as soon as possible after the meeting. Always ensure everyone who attends, or was absent, receives a copy or can access them electronically.

Arranging standardisation activities

You will need to plan and manage standardisation activities with your assessors and any other IQAs. Standardisation of practice ensures the assessment and IQA requirements are interpreted accurately, and that everyone is making comparable, fair and consistent decisions. You could have separate events for

assessors and IQAs (if there is more than one for your subject area). If the team is small, you could include a standardisation activity during the team meeting.

Aspects that can be standardised include:

- assessment activities - looking at safety and fairness, validity and reliability, deciding on alternative methods for particular learner requirements or needs;
- creating a bank of assessment materials, i.e., assignments, multiple-choice questions, oral questions, along with expected answers;
- how assessors interpret the standards and assessment requirements and how they reach their decisions;
- how learner evidence meets the requirements;
- the way assessment plans and feedback records are completed;
- the way feedback is given to learners;
- the way learner reviews are carried out;
- the way witness statements are used;
- updating assessment and IQA documentation, i.e., checklists, records, and templates.

One way to standardise practice between assessors is to ask them each to bring along a learner's evidence for a unit or aspect they have assessed, with their supporting assessment records. These can be swapped between assessors who can then reassess them. The activity could be anonymous if learner and assessor names are removed beforehand. A discussion can then take place to see if all assessors are interpreting the assessment requirements in the same way and are making the same decisions. This is also a chance to see how different assessors complete the records and the amount of detail they write. The activity can lead to an action plan for further training and development of assessor practice.

Assessment types and methods should also be standardised. If one assessor has produced a project or an assignment for their learners to carry out, they should share it with the other assessors. This will ensure all learners have access to the same assessment materials. It is also a chance to make sure any questions are pitched at the right level for the learners.

In summary

As an IQA your main role is to ensure that ALL aspects of the qualification are quality assured and your EQA will check to ensure that this is happening. The EQA will want to see evidence of all of the above not only being planned in, but actually taking place. By following the steps above you should be able to achieve this.

Please follow the above process for every Focus Awards qualification you deliver.

Contact us

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

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Version History

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