

Ofqual
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Awarding body monitoring report

NPTC

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Introduction

Regulating external qualifications

Responsibility for regulating external qualifications lies jointly with three regulators:

- the Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation (Ofqual)
- the Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills (DCELLS), the regulator for Wales
- the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA), the regulator for Northern Ireland.

Following the accreditation of a qualification, the regulators systematically monitor awarding organisations against the requirements set out in the statutory regulations. The aim of this activity is to promote continuing improvement and public confidence in the quality of external qualifications.

Where an awarding organisation is found not to comply with relevant criteria, the regulators set conditions of accreditation. Even if an awarding organisation is compliant, the monitoring team may make observations on ways that the awarding organisation could change its systems and procedures to improve clarity or reduce bureaucracy.

Accreditation conditions and observations arising from this monitoring activity are specified at the end of each section of this report. Awarding organisations are required to produce an action plan to show how they will deal with accreditation conditions imposed as a result of a monitoring activity. The regulators will agree the action plan and monitor its implementation

The regulators will use the outcomes of monitoring and any subsequent action taken by awarding organisations to inform decisions on the re-accreditation of qualifications, or if necessary, the withdrawal of accreditation.

Banked documents

As part of its awarding organisation recognition processes, the regulators require awarding organisations to submit certain documents to Ofqual for the purposes of 'banking' them centrally. Information from banked documents will be used to inform monitoring activities and may also affect the awarding organisation's risk rating.

A suite of documents has been identified as suitable for banking and are those that are considered to be the most crucial in supporting an awarding organisation's ability to operate effectively. To maintain the currency of the banked documents, awarding organisations are responsible for updating them as and when changes occur. They

are also reminded to review them at least annually as part of the annual self-assessment return.

About this report

This report is the outcome of a monitoring activity on the NPTC awarding organisation and was carried out by Ofqual on behalf of the regulators in May 2008. It draws together the regulator's findings on NPTC's access to the five-day accreditation, which was approved in January 2008 on areas of:

- corporate governance
- resources and expertise
- qualifications development – planning
- qualifications development – content and design of qualifications
- assessment arrangements – independent assessment
- assessment arrangements – internal assessment

This is the first post-accreditation monitoring activity on NPTC's activities since it became part of the City & Guilds Group in 2005. An awarding body recognition update (ABRU) was completed in 2006 for which there is one outstanding accreditation condition relating to certificate design.

The monitoring activities included desk research of information already held by the regulators, the ABRU submission and scrutiny of the NPTC website. The monitoring team visited NPTC's head office to conduct interviews with staff and review documentation. They observed a training day for the credit rating of units to check how the awarding organisation's quality assurance systems worked in practice.

About NPTC

NPTC provides access to a range of national vocational qualifications (NVQs), vocationally-related qualifications (VRQs), Entry level and higher level qualifications in the land-based sector. The awarding organisation also offers certificates of competence, which are licences to practice. For more information on NPTC and the qualifications it offers, visit the NPTC website at www.nptc.org.uk.

Corporate governance

This is subject to *The statutory regulation of external qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (QCA/04/1293), paragraphs 5, 6 and 7.

Findings

1. In 2002 NPTC became part of the City & Guilds Group. The awarding organisation sees this as a positive move, enabling NPTC to retain its identity, increase its portfolio of qualifications and utilise services such as IT infrastructures and generic policies developed by City & Guilds awards.
2. NPTC is a registered charity and a company limited by guarantee. It provides a range of qualifications in the land-based sector. The company has six members. These include NPTC, City & Guilds as the institutional member, the National Farmer's Union, the Transport and General Worker's Union, Landbased Colleges Aspiring to Excellence and the University College Union.
3. NPTC has its own Board of Trustees consisting of four members from City & Guilds and three elected members from the company. These changes were implemented in 2002. The Board of Trustees' remit is strategic and to ensure that NPTC maintains its charitable status.
4. There have been no changes to the awarding organisation's corporate governance arrangements since the ABRU was completed in 2005. The lines of reporting and accountability are clear. The chief executive is responsible for all operational issues and the quality assurance of awarding organisation activities, reporting directly to the Board of Trustees.
5. There are a number of teams and groups to support the work of the awarding organisation. These include the senior management team and qualification development groups.
6. All NPTC policies and procedures are supported by a documented Business improvement system, which is quality controlled externally through BS EN ISO 9001.2000 and internally by targeted audits. Existing policies and procedures are reviewed by senior managers and ratified by the chief executive.
7. The monitoring team were given full access to awarding organisation documentation, including the business plan, minutes of meetings and reports.

Accreditation conditions

There are no accreditation conditions for this section.

Observations

There are no observations for this section.

Resources and expertise

This is subject to *The statutory regulation of external qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (QCA/04/1293), paragraphs 8 and 10, and the *NVQ code of practice* (QCA/06/2888), paragraphs 4, 5, 19 and 71.

Findings

1. NPTC has expanded its range of qualifications in recent years. Some have been changed in response to new government legislation, which impacts on the delivery of its qualifications.
2. The awarding organisation has 43 employed staff at head office. They are split into various teams responsible for product development, verification services, customer service, sales and marketing, and finance and business support. These staff resources are sufficient to support NPTC's existing portfolio of accredited qualifications. Currently, NPTC has two temporary staff covering the additional workload created by the mandatory certificates of competence for transporting animals. Therefore, NPTC will need to keep under review its capacity to support additional qualifications.
3. The annual performance review process is based on general guidelines from City & Guilds awards and includes six monthly reviews. Training needs and individual performance objectives linked to team and company objectives are identified as part of this process.
4. NPTC has adopted some of City & Guilds awards' computer systems for finance and human resources. Although there were initial problems with integrating the software, these have now been resolved. The main issue for awarding organisation staff is that changes to shared policy documents controlled by City & Guilds awards in London are communicated promptly to NPTC and recorded. There needs to be a two-way mechanism, which allows both organisations to confirm any changes to policy documents. For example, it was unclear if the *External verifier's handbook*, dated February 2003, was being replaced by the new City & Guilds awards document *Ensuring quality – policy and practice for externally verified and moderated assessment* (March 2008).
5. The procedures for recruiting independent assessors are suitable. NPTC has about 930 independent assessors for the certificates of competence. All assessors must have the relevant qualifications, be endorsed by a centre and evaluated by a technical verifier before attending the two-day training programme. Their assessment practice is regularly reviewed by the technical verifiers.
6. NPTC has a team of 55 external verifiers managed by five lead verifiers. Of these, 10 are working towards V2. The procedures for recruiting, appointing,

training and deploying external verifiers are robust. They include a thorough application and selection process. The monitoring team were impressed with the selection process for external verifiers, which included self-evaluation of the role and a documented interview process. External verifiers attend an induction day with NPTC followed by a generic training day with City & Guilds awards based on the V2 standards. Potential external verifiers are accompanied at least twice by a lead verifier before being confirmed as suitable.

7. The monitoring team looked at the content of a number of sector-specific, external verifier training days. The content was suitable and included for example the roles and skills of the external verifier, and standardisation of candidate evidence. External verifiers also have a City & Guilds awards handbook dated 2003, but this refers to the *NVQ code of practice* 2001 (QCA/02/875). NPTC staff confirmed that this document is under review.
8. The external verifier files contain an overview of the process from initial selection to the ongoing monitoring of individual performance. External verifiers sign a letter of appointment to confirm that they will accept the *Standard terms and conditions for the supply of services*. The *NVQ code of practice* (QCA/06/2888), requires awarding organisations to provide a code of practice, which external verifiers must sign and agree to comply with. This must include for example continuing professional development (CPD) requirements and external verifier roles and responsibilities. Some of the requirements are met in the documentation, but CPD and appeals against external verifier decisions are not included. NPTC will need to amend the existing arrangements or develop a separate code of practice to meet these requirements.
9. External verifiers have annual performance reviews and are graded 1–3 according to their performance. This grading is based on the suitable completion of reports, feedback from centres and attendance at training days. The monitoring team noted that some external verifiers have action plans to improve performance.
10. NPTC has a number of qualifications in the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF). They employ consultants to write units and multiple-choice question papers. Consultants are given suitable written guidance to support them in this role. Training for the allocation of credit rating to units is also planned for June 2008.

Accreditation condition

1. NPTC must amend existing documentation or develop a separate code of practice for external verifiers, which include CPD requirements and appeals against external verifier decisions. External verifiers must agree to comply with this code (*NVQ code of practice* (QCA/06/2888), paragraph 4).

Observations

1. NPTC should keep under review its staffing resources so that it can support both existing and future qualifications.
2. NPTC should work with City & Guilds awards to develop arrangements for managing changes to key documents so that each organisation is using the latest version of shared policies, procedures and documents.

Qualifications development – planning

This is subject to *The statutory regulation of external qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (QCA/04/1293), paragraphs 1–4, 43 and 44.

Findings

1. The regulatory criteria specify that awarding organisations must submit a plan of proposed provision to the regulators. This requirement has changed in that plans of provision are now submitted to the relevant sector skills council (SSC). However, the regulators do require as part of the five-day accreditation process details of sector and subject areas, and the qualification types to be developed. NPTC submitted this plan as part of its application for five-day accreditation.
2. NPTC has a flowchart detailing how market research is used to identify a market or industry need. This includes consulting with the relevant SSC and industry. For example, if NPTC were considering a farming qualification they would consult the cross-country farming unions. With such expertise available, NPTC does not employ market research consultants. The flowchart forms part of the *Product development plan*, which comes under the *Business improvement system* and is subject to both internal and external auditing.
3. NPTC has suitable systems for evaluating the impact of potential qualifications on its existing provision and that of other providers. When considering new qualifications, the awarding organisation consults with the relevant SSC, looks at a range of information such as demographics, the sector strategy, numbers of people employed in different areas and changes to legislation. It seeks advice from other organisations in the industry and asks centres if there is a market need for the new qualifications in a specific sector. Centres also give an indication of the potential cost and timescales for delivery of the potential qualification.
4. Product development staff have suitable guidance on qualification development, explaining the stages of the process to be followed. The documentation is very detailed, explaining each stage from the initial idea to the launch of the qualification. This is good practice.

Accreditation conditions

There are no accreditation conditions for this section.

Observations

There are no observations for this section.

Qualifications development – content and design of qualifications

This is subject to *The statutory regulation of external qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (QCA/04/1293), paragraphs 45–55, and the *NVQ code of practice* (QCA/06/2888), paragraph 46.

Findings

1. There are suitable procedures in place to support qualifications development, which is a seven-stage process. Each stage or milestone is clearly documented, enabling NPTC to audit its own arrangements.
2. To check the robustness of these arrangements, the monitoring team looked at the development of a recent qualification, the level 1 Certificate in equine skills. It is clear that potential qualifications are subject to rigorous scrutiny throughout the process before they are signed off. Each stage is checked and agreed by the awarding organisation. However, NPTC identified that it would be more useful to add in the date of agreement for each step of the individual stages rather than the final date of the milestone to enable accurate tracking.
3. Milestone one is an initial proposal for consideration by the technical manager and includes information on why there is a need for this qualification. If the proposal is agreed, a formal business case is put forward.
4. The main stages for developing the content and design of the qualifications are milestones four and five. However, NPTC is more likely to make adjustments to existing qualifications than develop new qualifications. For example, if legislation changes in a specific sector these changes are included in the qualifications. If new qualifications are required, NPTC uses the relevant national occupational standards (NOS) for content if available. In some instances, NOS are not sufficiently detailed or do not exist. NPTC looks at the units required and broad learning outcomes using a qualification review group to consider the ideas.
5. NPTC uses the QCF templates to write the learning outcomes or specification. These templates include fields for the title, aims, scope, range, context and learning outcomes. There is a specific template for mapping the qualification content to the NOS. This supplements the SSC online competence framework, which maps qualifications to job roles. Consultants are trained by the product development team to create the content of these templates.
6. NPTC has suitable arrangements to determine the size and level of qualifications. This includes costing, timescales for achieving a specific level and consultation with training providers about how long it would take to train

candidates for a particular qualification. External advisors and tutors help NPTC determine the notional learning time. Draft specifications are put on the website and shared with a wider group at the consultation phase. This is good practice.

7. Consultants are given brief and detailed guidance on determining the level of qualifications. Learning outcomes are checked by NPTC for appropriateness and units are scrutinised to confirm that they are at the correct level. NPTC uses *The assessing NVQs* (1998) booklet for guidance in ensuring the level is appropriate.
8. NPTC staff in the product development team have also attended training on assigning credit to units. Many of NPTC's accredited qualifications are due for re-accreditation and they will be transferring them onto the QCF. They intend to use consultants to assist with this process.
9. NPTC bases the assessment models on the type of qualification being developed. The assessment methodology is reviewed by the product development team and consultants to ensure that it is at the correct level and satisfies the learning outcomes. Question banks are developed by consultants and reviewed at moderation meetings before they are independently reviewed. Assessment can include practical demonstrations, oral questioning or multiple-choice tests. For higher level candidates, the assessment methodology may include short-answer questions, assignments or written exams.
10. NPTC staff stated that during the qualification development phase, they check if assessment in Welsh is required. However the *Product development plan* does not identify where this happens in the process.
11. Awarding organisation staff confirmed that all qualifications are put through this qualification development process and will be subject to internal audit.

Accreditation conditions

There are no accreditation conditions for this section.

Observation

3. NPTC should include a stage in the flowchart for checking if assessment in Welsh is required.

Assessment arrangements – independent assessment

This is subject to *The statutory regulation of external qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (QCA/04/1293), paragraphs 13, 36, 38–42, 56–58.

Findings

1. When new qualifications are launched the regulators expect awarding organisations to have suitable guidance and quality assurance arrangements in place to promote reliable and consistent results. This will include for example information and guidance for item writers, examiners, moderators, external verifiers and centres. The effectiveness of these procedures was not tested.
2. The monitoring team looked at examples of the guidance documents to support the level 1 Certificate in equine skills (7477–01). NPTC uses some of the document templates developed by City & Guilds and personalises them. Guidance documents include the *Qualification handbook* detailing the standards to be assessed, assessment methods and evidence required. These can be downloaded from the NPTC website and are available for all accredited qualifications.
3. There are arrangements to protect the security of question papers and mark schemes during the development and evaluation stages. These include the tracking of items sent by courier and that the content of electronic messages must not be copied. Papers from meetings are collected and shredded. However, the arrangements are not documented. NPTC needs to review the existing arrangements and develop contingency plans so that candidates are not disadvantaged if security is breached during either of these stages.
4. NPTC uses the Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ) guidelines as the basis of its security arrangements for examinations and this is clearly specified in its documentation. The monitoring team is confident that all reasonable precautions have been taken.
5. Examiners have access to a number of generic documents to assist them in their role. In addition, they have the document *Assessment handbook – written exams: Guide for examination writers and moderators*. This explains the arrangements for marking, administrative requirements and standardisation. NPTC also issues guidance developed by the regulators about credit and levelling.

Accreditation conditions

There are no accreditation conditions for this section.

Observation

- 4 NPTC should review and document its security arrangements for the development and evaluation of independent assessment test items.

Assessment arrangements – internal assessment

This is subject to *The statutory regulation of external qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (QCA/04/1293), paragraphs 13, 36, 38–42, 56, 57 and 59–62.

Findings

1. The monitoring team looked at the guidance documents to support the assessment and verification of NVQs and VRQs, but did not test the effectiveness of these procedures.
2. NPTC provides award-specific guidance to centres and candidates. The information and documents for each qualification are available on the website. Details of the responsibilities of assessors, internal verifiers and the awarding organisation's requirements for maintaining records are included within this documentation.
3. NPTC uses some of the documentation developed by City & Guilds awards for its centres such as *Ensuring quality – policy and practice for externally verified and moderated assessment* (2008). This document contains information on the timelines for keeping assessment records and explains the quality assurance arrangements required for NVQs or VRQs. The awarding organisation also arranges workshops for assessors and internal verifiers when new qualifications are launched.
4. External verifiers have *Ensuring quality* and the *External verifier's handbook* (2003) to assist them in their role. The latter document pre-dates the *NVQ code of practice* (QCA/06/2888), and neither document includes any information on the requirement to take additional samples if standards are not being met. NPTC confirmed that this requirement is covered during training days.
5. The monitoring team is confident that centres, assessors, internal and external verifiers are provided with suitable guidance to support the delivery of its accredited qualifications.

Accreditation condition

2. NPTC must include information on additional sampling in the guidance for external verifiers (*The statutory regulation of external qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (QCA/04/1293), paragraph 61d, iii, and the *NVQ code of practice* (QCA/06/2888), paragraph 64).

Observations

There are no observations for this section.

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