Awarding body monitoring report for:

The Open College of the North West (OCNW)

Contents

Introduction

Regulating external qualifications

Responsibility for regulating external qualifications lies jointly with three qualifications regulators:

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

Following the accreditation of a qualification, the qualifications regulators systematically monitor awarding bodies 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 body is found not to comply with relevant criteria, the regulators set conditions of accreditation. Even where an awarding body is compliant, the monitoring team may make observations on ways that the awarding body 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 bodies 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 bodies to inform decisions on the re-accreditation of qualifications, or, if necessary, the withdrawal of accreditation.

Banked documents

As part of their awarding body recognition process the regulators require awarding bodies to submit certain documents to Ofqual for the purposes of 'banking' centrally. Information from banked documents will be used to inform monitoring activities and may also affect the awarding body's risk rating.

A suite of documents has been identified as suitable for banking and are those considered to be most crucial in supporting an awarding body's ability to operate effectively. To maintain the currency of the banked documents awarding bodies are responsible for updating them as and

when changes occur. They are also reminded to review them at least annually at the time of completion of their self assessment return.

About this report

The monitoring activity for the Open College of the North West (OCNW) was carried out by Ofqual on behalf of the regulators in September 2008.

The monitoring focused on the regulatory criteria relating to the following key areas but specifically those relating to the qualifications development process against the OCNW application for access to the 5-day accreditation process:

- corporate governance
- resources and expertise
- qualifications development
  - planning
  - content and design of assessment
- quality assurance of the qualifications process
  - assessment arrangements
  - independent assessment.

The monitoring activities included desk research of information already held by the regulators including the awarding body 5-day application and scrutiny of the OCNW website. The monitoring team visited the OCNW head office to conduct interviews with staff and review documentation.

This report draws together the regulators' findings from these monitoring activities.

About OCNW

OCNW is distinctive in that it is both an awarding body recognised by the qualification regulators and an access validating agency for 'Access to Higher Education' Programmes, licensed by the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) for Higher Education. OCNW is therefore able to offer a comprehensive ladder of opportunities to centres and their learners, starting at pre-entry programmes and progressing to QAA-recognised access to higher education qualifications or professional Further Education Teaching Certificates. For further information on OCNW and its qualifications, please see www.ocnw.com.

Corporate governance

This is subject to *The statutory regulation of external qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (2004)*, paragraphs 5, 6 and 7.

Findings

1. OCNW was last monitored in 2004. It continues to be an unincorporated association of members that determines the make-up of the Board and the committee structure. The Board consists of 25 members representing the sector areas, including further and higher education and adult learning.

2. The three main committees that report to the Board are the Access Co-ordinators Committee, the Quality Standards Committee (QSC) and the Finance and General Purposes Committee. The Access Co-ordinators Committee is a non-executive committee dealing with access to higher education. The QSC monitors OCNW provision, standards and quality assurance arrangements, whilst the Finance and General Purposes Committee reviews the business plan, budget and human resources.

3. There are a variety of review panels that can be convened as and when required to deal with specific issues such as reviewing new qualifications or dealing with appeals. The panels report to the QSC.

4. Although the organisation has grown in the areas of qualifications development and business development, the way in which the organisation is structured remains the same. The chief executive is the single named point of accountability with the deputy chief executive providing day-to-day operational support.

5. OCNW works to a three year strategic business plan that is reviewed annually.

6. Since it was last monitored OCNW has agreed a franchise arrangement with a separate organisation to deliver some of the OCNW qualifications. In addition to this OCNW has another arrangement in place in the form of a collaboration agreement. There are detailed contracts and service level agreements in place which states the roles and responsibilities of each party involved. OCNW has arrangements in place to monitor all of its contractual arrangements.

7. Information held at Ofqual includes the procedures that relate to qualifications development. These have evolved over time and therefore differ from those submitted in the original 5-day accreditation application in 2006. The current documents were made available to the monitoring team prior to the monitoring activity. However, it is a requirement that the

regulators are informed of any changes to the qualifications development process. OCNW must have a mechanism in place to submit updated processes for qualifications development to the regulators.

Accreditation conditions

1. OCNW must have a mechanism to inform the regulatory authorities of any changes to its procedures for qualifications development as specified in the terms and conditions for access to the 5-day accreditation system (*The statutory regulation of external qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (2004)*, paragraph 6c).

Observations

1. Prior to the monitoring activity, OCNW were asked to resubmit any banked documents that were identified as being as out of date to ensure Ofqual had the current versions. These were reviewed by the monitoring team and discussed with OCNW staff. The documents relating to partnership/franchising/licensing arrangements, customer service statements and enquiries and appeals require further amendment before being resubmitted for banking.

Resources and expertise

This is subject to *The statutory regulation of external qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (2004)*, paragraphs 8 and 10.

Findings

1. OCNW has approximately 22 full-time staff. The work falls into four main teams including qualifications development, business development, operations and corporate events and services. There is a senior management team (SMT) made up of the chief executive, deputy chief executive, the director of business development and the director of qualifications.

2. The director of qualifications manages the qualifications development team. The team consists of a senior development manager and two development managers who all work on the development of qualifications. There is also a quality assurance manager who has responsibility for centres and moderators.

3. All staff are subject to annual appraisal through which resources and learning and development needs are identified. OCNW provides staff with training for the appraisee and the appraiser. The teams, including the senior management team, also carry out a planned programme of self review.

4. The system of self review looks at individual and team workload and identifies where new resources are needed. The review system has been effective in identifying growth areas and highlights where OCNW needs to consider recruiting new staff. For instance, it showed that there was a need for a senior development manager to look after the teacher training qualifications, which has been a significant area of growth. OCNW management is already aware that the area of functional skills is growing and may require additional resources in the future. The team reviews are being closely monitored. All requests for new posts are approved by the Finance and General Purposes Committee.

5. OCNW is in a transitional phase with regard to building up its expertise to deal with the demands of the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF). Members of the qualifications development team attend a variety of training and information sessions such as Federation of Awarding Body events, one of which looked at unit templates. They also refer to the QCF test and trials documents produced by the QCA. Information is shared across the team. Future team training may include specific sessions such as assigning credit.

6. OCNW employs 26 external moderators, led by the quality assurance manager, to quality assure centres and moderate candidates work. They are recruited when the need arises through advertisements in journals and on the OCNW website. A standard process for

recruitment is followed that includes an application form and interview. Newly appointed moderators receive initial training where they are provided with the *Foundation Information File*, which contains guidance documentation. Thereafter they attend an annual training and standardisation event, attendance at which is mandatory. New moderators shadow experienced moderators on centre visits and are accompanied on visits until they are competent to do them alone.

7. To date, monitoring of external moderators has been carried out through their centre visit and moderation reports. However the OCNW annual self assessment has identified that this needs to be formalised and that annual performance reports are a statutory requirement. A proposal outlining the new arrangements is due to go to the SMT.

8. Item writers are employed to assist with qualifications development or writing assessment tasks. They are recruited to the same standard format as moderators and attend initial training on OCNW systems and procedures. Those used for the functional skills qualifications are also invited to attend QCA hosted training on functional skills including standardisation and awarding events.

9. OCNW receives information technology support from Lancaster University to protect its database. This is done through a virtual server and the university has disaster recovery plans, which indicate that recovery could be within 24 hours. The website is hosted by an external company operating off-site.

Accreditation conditions

There are no accreditation conditions for this section.

Observations

There are no observations for this section.

Qualifications development: planning

This is subject to *The statutory regulation of external qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (2004)*, paragraphs 1, 4 and 43–44.

Findings

1. OCNW has dedicated systems and procedures in place to control the development and production of qualifications which is primarily the responsibility of the qualifications development team. OCNW produces an annual qualifications schedule that has to fit within the overall strategic plan and business objectives. Both are subject to approval by the Board.

2. However, the qualifications schedule is sufficiently flexible to accommodate developments that may occur throughout the year. The schedule was made available to the monitoring team. It shows the qualifications to be developed; proposed submission dates and identifies the lead developer responsible for overseeing the process for each qualification.

3. All qualifications development, whether new, revised or updated, follows a documented standardised process.

4. Proposals for new qualifications come from a variety of sources. These can include feedback from customers or sectors or can arise from specific initiatives such as those for functional skills and ESOL qualifications. Development managers maintain working relationships with their Sector Skills Councils through attendance at awarding body forums and other meetings. However, OCNW has identified in its annual self assessment that these relationships require strengthening.

5. The relevant development manager carries out initial market research and takes the rationale for the proposal to the director of qualifications. This is usually in the form of a discussion or e-mail exchange. The director of qualifications will take the initial proposal to the SMT meeting where there is a standing agenda item for reports from the directors. SMT review the rationale and consider the impact of the qualification on the organisation before they make the decision on whether to proceed with the development. The discussion and the decisions made are recorded in minutes, examples of which were seen by the monitoring team.

6. The Procedural File for the development of a QCA approved qualification details the market research that should take place and also includes a flow chart. The director of qualifications will not take the initial proposal forward to SMT without being satisfied that the appropriate research has been carried out. However, as the initial process that takes place prior to the SMT meeting is not formally documented there is nothing that confirms what market research has taken place.

7. If the proposal is accepted by SMT, work will begin to complete a full Proposal for Approval in Principal form. The new qualification is added to the qualifications development schedule which allows ongoing development to be monitored. At this point a lead developer is allocated. This is usually the development manager with the most appropriate sector expertise.

Accreditation conditions

There are no accreditation conditions for this section.

Observations

2. OCNW should consider formalising the initial part of the qualifications development process to ensure that all required aspects are confirmed including the market research that has taken place.

Qualifications development: content and design of qualifications

This is subject to *The statutory regulation of external qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (2004)*, paragraphs 33a and 45–55.

Findings

1. The Procedural File for the development of a QCA approved qualification is the main document that OCNW has produced relating to qualifications development. It contains guidance on the design of qualifications with details of the quality assurance of the development process. It includes a series of flow charts such as that outlining the market research process and another outlining the stages in the development process. The qualifications team's self review has identified the need to update OCNW's qualifications development procedures to allow for the requirements of the QCF.

2. All qualifications are subject to a seven stage phased process of milestones, called decision points. These commence with the Board's agreement of the strategic plan and continue through to the initial assessment of any new proposal and the development and sign-off of a Proposal for Approval in Principal form. They finish with the final review processes prior to submission to Ofqual. The decision points outlined in the flow chart are explained in more detail, defining the work required, within the main body of the Procedural File for the development of a QCA approved qualification.

3. Development managers are responsible for the operational development of new qualifications following the defined decision points for production. They consult with potential users and sector organisations to determine the qualification structure and appropriate assessment methodologies.

4. OCNW's *Procedural File for the development of a QCA approved qualification includes* a guidance document on selecting the most appropriate assessment methodology. It also has guidelines on the writing of the qualifications specification and a section on equality of opportunity in the design and development of qualifications.

5. Internal consultation with the operations team ensures that the development fits in operationally and identifies any implications for the staff or the database. Other internal communication is with the quality assurance manager to ensure that the assessment and moderation methods fit with existing OCNW systems as well as looking at any implications for the recruitment of moderators with sufficient expertise.

6. At the end of the internal and external consultations the lead developer will take all the findings into account before putting together the *Proposal for Approval in Principal form*. The form includes the rationale with a proposed title, structure and volume of the qualification along with the level and assessment arrangements. The director of qualifications will then decide whether to take the development further by taking it forward to the QSC for approval.

7. Decision point 4 is when the fully completed Proposal for Approval in Principal form is submitted to the QSC to approve the development in principal, to sanction its further development or to reject the proposal.

8. Once approval is given by the QSC the lead developers engage with external consultants who are tasked with writing the qualification specification and/or assessment materials. There is a range of subject specialists used for the different qualifications. For instance, OCNW retain the services of five item writers for the functional skills suite of qualifications. There are three used for ICT and Maths and another two for English. For the teacher training qualifications the senior development manager has expertise in this field and works with an experienced moderator to produce materials.

9. There is no specific documented guidance provided to item writers on how to write questions. OCNW staff interviewed stated that for the few item writers currently used they are confident that the training they provide is sufficient to equip them with the necessary skills. Whilst this is manageable at this time staff recognise that documented guidance would be useful as an additional resource should the numbers of item writers increase.

10. Materials are sent in to the lead developer who then initiates a review process. A reviewer who is another subject specialist is identified to review the materials. This person could be a moderator. Once any appropriate amendments have been made a reviser is used to work through the materials as a candidate to test them in practice. The materials are then formatted into OCNW house style and proofread for content and use of language.

11. Once the review process is complete the lead developer arranges for a review panel to be convened to look at the qualification in its entirety. This is decision point seven. The review panel is chaired by the director of qualifications who has overall responsibility for Ofqual approved qualifications. Other members are the lead developer, lead moderator, operations manager and the relevant subject specialists/consultants used in the development.

12. The remit of the review panel is to check that all the OCNW quality assurance processes have been followed and to review all the supporting documentation before signing it off prior to submission to Ofqual. The panels are fully supported by the OCNW secretariat and

decisions recorded. Minutes are forwarded to the QSC. Copies of minutes of several review panels were made available to the monitoring team.

13. The process culminates in product completion and a lead developer not involved in the development checks that the relevant documentation is in place and the web-based accreditation information is accurate before final submission to Ofqual.

14. Evidence was provided which confirmed that the quality assurance of the qualifications development process follows the defined procedures. Additionally, the existing system will be reviewed against the finalised and published new QCF regulations.

15. All development staff interviewed confirmed the process relating to qualifications development as described in both the documentation and as outlined by other senior staff interviewed.

Accreditation conditions

There are no accreditation conditions for this section.

Observations

3. OCNW may wish to consider drawing up documented guidance for its item writers.

Assessment arrangements: independent assessment

This is subject to *The statutory regulation of external qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (2004)*, paragraphs 13, 38–42 and 56–58.

Findings

1. As stated previously, the focus of this monitoring activity was on qualifications development. It includes ensuring the awarding body has produced sufficient guidance to all those involved in assessment prior to their launch. This can be guidance to item writers, examiners, verifiers, moderators and to centres to allow them to deliver the qualification. The guidance should also ensure that effective quality assurance procedures are in place that are capable of producing reliable results. This monitoring activity did not check the effectiveness of these procedures.

2. The monitoring team looked at examples of the guidance documents that were available to support the functional skills and the teacher training qualifications. All documentation to support the delivery of all qualifications can be downloaded from the OCNW website.

3. The qualification specifications for the functional skills qualifications include background information on the qualification, the assessment and moderation arrangements and the examinations officers and invigilators. The instructions provide details on the authentication of candidates at assessments and the security and storage of assessment papers.

4. The assessments for the teaching qualifications are carried out through internal assessment, including observation of teaching practice, with internal and external moderation. The qualification specifications contain additional information on the internal and external moderation arrangements. There is also information on the procedures for centres wishing to devise their own tasks which all require authorisation by OCNW.

5. Internal assessment and moderation requirements for centres form part of the approval process and ongoing compliance is checked through twice yearly centre visits by external moderators. The visits confirm that the centres arrangements for internal moderation are in place by checking for evidence of standardisation meetings and by the sampling of assessment and assessment records. Recent examples of completed external moderator reports were made available to the monitoring team.

6. Guidance for external moderators is provided in the form of the *Foundation Information File*, which is available to them through a secure section of the OCNW website. It includes their roles and responsibilities, guidance on sampling, guidance on completion of centre visit reports and all the relevant recording forms.

7. There was sufficient guidance available and quality assurance arrangements in place to support the effective delivery of OCNW's qualifications.

Accreditation conditions

There are no accreditation conditions for this section.

Observations

There are no observations for this section.