



Awarding body monitoring report for: The Institute of Revenues, Rating and Valuation (IRRV)

March 2009

Ofqual/09/4636

Contents

Introduction	4
Regulating external qualifications.....	4
Banked documents	4
About this report	5
About the IRRV	5
Corporate governance.....	6
Findings	6
Accreditation conditions.....	7
Observations.....	7
Resources and expertise.....	8
Findings	8
Accreditation conditions.....	9
Observations.....	9
Quality assurance and control of independent assessment.....	10
Findings	10
Accreditation conditions.....	12
Observations.....	12
Determination and reporting of results.....	13
Findings	13
Accreditation conditions.....	14
Observations.....	14

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 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 if 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 processes, 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 that are 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 the self-assessment return.

About this report

This report is the outcome of a monitoring activity on the Institute of Revenues, Rating and Valuation (IRRV) awarding body and was carried out by Ofqual on behalf of the regulators in January 2009. It draws together the regulator's findings on the IRRV's arrangements for:

- corporate governance
- resources and expertise
- quality assurance and control of independent assessment
- determining and reporting of results.

This is the second post-accreditation monitoring activity on the IRRV's activities. In addition an Awarding Body Recognition Update was completed in 2006 for which there are no outstanding accreditation conditions.

The monitoring activities included desk research of information already held by the regulators, the self-assessment return and scrutiny of the IRRV website. The monitoring team visited the IRRV's head office to conduct interviews with staff and review documentation. They also observed an awarding meeting to check how the awarding body's quality assurance systems worked in practice.

About the IRRV

The IRRV offers vocationally related qualifications (VRQs) related to local taxation, housing and council tax benefits. For more information on the IRRV and the qualifications it offers visit the IRRV website at www.irrv.org.uk.

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. There have been some changes to the structure of the IRRV since the previous monitoring activity in 2005. A revised structure was presented to the regulators that showed a change in reporting lines and an additional board with responsibility for VRQs. The awarding body remains within the professional services arm and reports to the deputy chief executive.
2. The IRRV is governed by a council consisting of elected members from the institute. Its role is strategic across the whole organisation. The lines of reporting are clear and robust. There are three groups that support the work of the awarding body. The Law Research and Education Committee (LREC) oversees all education activities and reports directly to the council. Changes to policies are agreed by the N/SVQ management committee whereas the Exams and Assessment Board (EAB) looks at operational and assessment matters. Both report to the LREC.
3. The EAB and N/SVQ management committee operate independently when developing policies for the banked documents because of the differences in NVQs and VRQs. This has resulted in some duplication and unclear information for candidates. The IRRV has been directed to review some of its banked documents so that they meet the statutory regulations and are clear to candidates.
4. The chief executive is the single named point of accountability. However, the responsibility for maintaining the quality and standards of the qualifications is included in the job description of the head of professional services. He manages the day-to-day operation of the awarding body and reports directly to the deputy chief executive. The monitoring team noted that certificates for accredited qualifications did not include the name, title and signature of the single named point of accountability which is a statutory requirement. Currently the certificates are signed by the president of the IRRV. The main issue for the IRRV to consider is who should be the single named point of accountability for maintaining the quality and standards of the qualifications and update the relevant job description to reflect this role.
5. The current business objectives are determined by the awarding body team and agreed by the N/SVQ management committee. It is not clear if the EAB has any input in the plan before it is noted by the Council in terms of the institute's overall plan.

6. The monitoring team was given full access to awarding body documentation, including business objectives, minutes of meetings, reports and banked documents.

Accreditation conditions

1. The IRRV must review the role of the single named point of accountability and inform the regulators when this is confirmed. The awarding body must provide an updated job description showing responsibility for the quality and standards of the accredited qualifications. In addition the certificates must include the name, title and signature of the single named point of accountability (*The statutory regulation of external qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (2004)*, paragraphs 5b and 22a).

Observations

1. The IRRV is reminded to review and update the banked documents as agreed with the monitoring team.
2. The IRRV should encourage the EAB and N/SVQ management committee to work together to develop generic policies so that they are clear and avoid duplication.

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. The IRRV has three full time staff responsible for its accredited qualifications including the head of professional services. One staff member is responsible for the VRQ and the other for N/SVQs. The job descriptions for these staff include common areas to allow for cover during periods of absence. However, the IRRV stated its intention to increase candidate numbers and put forward additional qualifications for accreditation in 2009. The monitoring team considers that the proposed expansion would place additional pressures on staff resources particularly during the exam cycle.
2. A formal staff appraisal process is in place. All staff have access to specific training as required. They attend stakeholder events and contribute to Sector Skills Council developments in their sector area.
3. The IRRV has suitable arrangements to protect its data. An external organisation backs up and stores the data offsite every day.
4. There are suitable procedures for recruiting examiners. They are recruited via advertisements in the institute's journal, the website or from local authorities. Potential examiners submit an application form, curricula vitae and references. Applications are reviewed by the EAB and confirmed if suitable. All examiners are contracted on a rolling contract.
5. There are about seven examiners for the accredited VRQ. Their role is to write examination papers and mark scripts. Each examiner is assigned a mentor with appropriate technical expertise in their area. Mentors are also moderators. They review examination papers, moderate marked scripts and monitor examiner performance. Mentors are members of the EAB and are selected on the basis of their experience in a specific subject area.
6. The IRRV provides examiners with the *Examiner code of conduct, 2007* to support them in their role. This contains information on setting questions, mark schemes, syllabus coverage, marking and the examiner's responsibility to ensure confidentiality, fairness and consistency. While there is reference to fairness, equality of opportunity should be explicit within the documentation.

7. Examiners have access to their mentor to discuss specific issues. This is good practice but they do not have the opportunity to meet with other examiners to discuss generic issues relating to examinations. The monitoring team noted considerable variances in the format of draft examination papers, mark schemes and the recording of marks on scripts. To promote consistency across examiners the IRRV may wish to consider providing an annual training day to deal with issues applicable to all examiners, irrespective of their technical area.

Accreditation conditions

There are no accreditation conditions for this section.

Observations

3. The IRRV should consider reviewing staff resources if its portfolio of qualifications increases.
4. The IRRV should consider making explicit its reference to equality of opportunity in the guidance document for examiners.
5. The IRRV should consider introducing an annual training day for examiners to promote consistency in generic issues common to all examiners.

Quality assurance and control of independent assessment

This is subject to *The statutory regulation of external qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (2004)*, paragraphs 13, 36, 38–42 and 56–58.

Findings

1. The monitoring team looked at the quality assurance arrangements to support the delivery of VRQs. Currently, the IRRV offers the level 3 Certificate in local taxation and benefits. This qualification is being replaced by a newer version that consists of mandatory units instead of optional units. The assessment methodology for the new qualification is external examinations.
2. Owing to the nature of changing legislation in the subject area candidates must pass all units to gain the full award within a two year period. The syllabus for each unit sets out the exam regulations and associated procedures. Examinations may be taken in June or December of each year at pre-selected examination centres across the country.
3. The IRRV has quality assurance arrangements in place to standardise independent assessment. For example, examiners must declare conflicts of interest and cannot teach units if they have written the examination papers. Also, if an examiner recognises a candidate's handwriting when marking additional scrutiny arrangements are in place.
4. Assessment tasks are independently reviewed by the EAB. Examination papers and mark schemes are written by the relevant examiner and checked by the moderator for that unit. The draft paper is submitted to the EAB for a series of checks. These checks include syllabus coverage and plain English. Any amendments requested by the EAB are completed by the examiner and moderator before final approval. A completion sheet is signed by the examiner and moderator to confirm agreement of the final examination paper.
5. The arrangements to protect the security of draft and final examination papers and mark schemes are suitable. Draft examination papers and mark schemes are destroyed after the EAB meeting. Access to examination papers is password protected. The assessment and training manager photocopies the final version of the examination papers which are sent to centres one week before the examination.
6. The IRRV specifies the security arrangements for examinations. Candidates have to show a candidate entry card on examination day. The awarding body said that candidate signatures are checked against the application form. Candidates who cannot produce a

candidate entry card must provide another form of identification such as a bank card. The monitoring team considered that whilst this could confirm the candidate's identity, best practice would be to request a form of photographic identification. Post examination invigilators send scripts by special delivery to the examiner stipulated by the awarding body. If scripts cannot be sent immediately they must be securely stored. The EAB carries out spot checks to ensure that centres are meeting its invigilation requirements and storing papers securely. All centres are spot checked over the course of a year. This is good practice.

7. Examiners have about 10 days to mark the scripts. A moderation sample of 10% or a minimum of 10 scripts including borderlines is sent to the moderator for checking. If marks are adjusted by the moderator this is recorded and the final mark is sent electronically to the IRRV. Marks for the remaining scripts are sent electronically to the IRRV by the examiners. Examiners are required to comment on each examination detailing general performance across questions and highlighting areas for improvement. These can be accessed via the IRRV website.
8. The moderation sample is pre-selected by the EAB before scripts are sent to examiners. At least 50% of examiners are moderated in a single session so that over two examinations all units and examiners are included. The monitoring team looked at a number of marked scripts and it was impossible to tell if these had been moderated as there were no comments or changes to marks recorded. In addition, examiner marks were recorded as single strokes or numbers. There did not appear to be a standard system for recording marks on scripts.
9. The remaining scripts in each session are not checked by the moderator or the awarding body. The monitoring team considers this to be a risk and it would have more confidence in the process if these scripts were subject to a clerical check to minimise the potential for human error.
10. The IRRV has procedures to monitor the work of its examiners. There is usually only one examiner and moderator for a specific unit so variances in marking are unlikely. Each moderator produces a report on examiner performance using a criterion rating form against specific areas with general comments. Any issues relating to examiner performance are identified and appropriate support is provided by the mentor. The IRRV confirmed that scripts would be reallocated if there were any issues with examiner marking. The monitoring team looked at a sample of these reports and noted that the rating system does not give an overall level of performance. It may be useful if the IRRV

used these reports to identify any generic issues across examiners to inform future training needs.

11. A sample of moderated scripts is returned to the awarding body for archiving purposes. The IRRV said that this procedure has recently been introduced but they intended to keep sample scripts for a period of 10 years. The remaining scripts are kept by examiners or moderators for six months before disposal.

Accreditation conditions

2. The IRRV must introduce additional checks on scripts not included in the moderation sample to minimise the risk of human error (*The statutory regulation of external qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (2004)*, paragraph 56).

Observations

6. The IRRV should consider only accepting photographic proof of identity if candidates cannot produce the candidate entry card issued by the IRRV.
7. The IRRV should consider introducing a standardised system for recording marks on scripts and include both examiner and moderator marks where applicable.
8. The IRRV should consider reviewing the procedures for examiner monitoring so that they have an overarching view of examiner performance to inform any future training needs.

Determination and reporting of results

This is subject to *The statutory regulation of external qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (2004)*, paragraphs 63–67.

Findings

1. The IRRV has formal awarding arrangements in place. Pass marks and results are confirmed by the EAB. The pass mark is set at 50% for the full qualification which is not graded. Candidates must pass all units. Individual units are graded as follows: marginal fail 44% to 49%, pass 50% and distinction 75%. The results slip issued to candidates includes clear information on individual unit grades with the final mark recorded as a pass or fail.
2. Examiners record the marks for each question answered by candidates and forward these to the moderator. After moderation the spreadsheets are updated with the amended marks where applicable. Alterations to marks are recorded by the moderator but the spreadsheet does not show the original mark allocated before moderation, therefore the IRRV cannot tell if marks for individual questions have been amended by the moderator. While this may provide sound results the monitoring team considers that this system does not enable the awarding body to maintain a comprehensive record of the decisions taken. If there was an appeal the awarding body would need information on all marks awarded by both the examiner and moderator.
3. When all marks are received the EAB meets to determine the results. A member of the monitoring team observed an awarding meeting and was satisfied with procedures followed. They noted that the moderator had investigated why the pass marks for this session were significantly different from previous years and reported his findings to the EAB.
4. During the meeting a candidate who marginally failed one unit was awarded a pass. The IRRV advised the observer that if a candidate had achieved all the other required units with a total mark of 55% including the marginal fail the candidate would pass. However, the script was not checked. The IRRV explained its rationale for allowing the pass in that the subject matter of individual units is related, therefore an element of compensation could be allowed for the marginal fail provided that the IRRV is confident the candidate has sufficient knowledge overall. The monitoring team accepted the rationale presented for upgrading the candidate but considers that the marginal fail script should have been checked before the final decision was made. The procedure should be documented to ensure consistency of approach.

5. The awarding body has arrangements to adjust marks for special consideration. These are considered during the awarding meeting to confirm the final results.
6. Result slips are sent to candidates one week after the awarding meeting and posted on the password protected area of the IRRV website.

Accreditation conditions

3. The IRRV must ensure that both examiner and moderator marks are recorded so that differences in marks can be tracked (*The statutory regulation of external qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (2004)*, paragraph 63c).

Observations

9. The IRRV should document its rationale and procedure for upgrading a marginal fail in one unit to an overall pass where all other units have been achieved.

