



Qualifications and
Curriculum Authority



Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru
Welsh Assembly Government



Post-accreditation monitoring report: British Safety Council Awards (BSC Awards)

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Introduction

Regulating external qualifications

Responsibility for regulating external qualifications lies jointly with three regulatory authorities:

- the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA)
- the Department for Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills (DELLS)
- the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA), for Northern Ireland.

Following the accreditation of a qualification, the regulatory authorities 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 regulatory authorities 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 action plan will be agreed by the regulatory authorities and its implementation monitored.

The regulatory authorities 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.

About this report

This report is the outcome of monitoring activity carried out on British Safety Council Awards (BSC Awards) awarding body. Monitoring was carried out by QCA on behalf of the regulatory authorities and started in April 2006.

This is the first post-accreditation monitoring activity on BSC Awards' activities since its recognition as an awarding body. The report draws together the regulatory authorities'

findings on the arrangements BSC Awards has for developing and supporting its qualifications.

About British Safety Council Awards (BSC Awards)

BSC Awards provides access to a range of vocationally related qualifications in health and safety. For more information on BSC Awards and the qualifications it offers visit the BSC Awards website at www.bscawards.org.

Corporate governance

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

Findings

1. The awarding body has been recognised since 2004 and is in the process of reviewing some of its policies and procedures. The awarding body team is small and the organisational chart shows clear lines of reporting and accountability. However, the regulatory authorities are concerned that BSC Awards has only one approved centre (apart from military centres) offering qualifications at levels 3 and 6. The approved centre has a direct link to the awarding body through its parent organisation the British Safety Council (BSC). This could be construed as restrictive practice.
2. All full-time staff understand the strategic aims and objectives of the awarding body. This is reinforced both at the appointment stage and through the staff appraisal system.

Accreditation conditions

There are no accreditation conditions for this section.

Observations

1. BSC Awards should ensure that it offers national access to its qualifications.

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. BSC Awards has sufficient staff at its head office to deal with the current registration and certification of candidates, as well as the development of quality assurance arrangements. The awarding body anticipates a high volume of registrations for its Entry level awards and will need to review staffing resources if this happens.
2. To help staff understand the awarding body systems BSC Awards has documented its approach to central systems in line with the regulatory criteria. This is good practice. However, the existing *Standard operating procedures* (SOP) pre-dates BSC Awards' recognition as an awarding body and needs updating to support its central systems document.
3. The appraisal system for full time staff was revised in 2005. This includes new job descriptions based on objectives within the strategic plan, and an interim and full review every year. Contracted staff such as examiners do not have formal reviews but systems are in place to monitor and report on performance and to check errors in marking.
4. BSC Awards has two chief examiners taking responsibility for specific qualifications. They are supported by 12 assistant examiners. The minimum requirement for an assistant or chief examiner is a level 6 diploma in occupational safety and health. Examiners and the chair of examiners have job descriptions but the procedures for recruiting, appointing and training examiners in the SOP will need to be revised to take account of any changes. The monitoring team noted the *Invitation to join panel of examiners* form, which details the duties and responsibilities of examiners, the terms and conditions and the requirement to declare any conflict of interest. Examiners confirm in writing their acceptance of these terms.
5. Item writers responsible for developing multiple-choice questions or short-answer questions are issued with the *Plain English guide to written English* (2001) and *Guidance to examiners* to assist them with this process. BSC Awards stated that the

chief examiner for each qualification writes the items and/or short-answer questions.

6. Examiners are expected to attend a training day and qualification-specific standardisation days. There are agendas to support the activities BSC Awards undertakes with its examiners. Examiners are encouraged to participate in continuing professional development activities that lead to chartered status and membership of the Institution of Occupational Safety and Health (IOSH).

Accreditation conditions

1. BSC Awards must review and update its existing *Standard operating procedures* to support its central systems document and ensure that all procedures meet the requirements of the regulatory authorities (*The statutory regulations of external qualifications*, paragraph 8).

Observations

2. BSC Awards should keep staff resources under review if there is a significant increase in registrations so that its responsibilities to candidates and centres, and its customer service targets, can be met.

Plan of provision

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. BSC Awards submitted its most recent biannual plan of provision in April 2006. This clearly identifies the sectors in which the awarding body offers qualifications and new qualifications to be developed, with timelines. The awarding body confirmed that it would not be requesting any extensions or amendments this year.
2. The plan provides a rationale for each of the qualifications and BSC Awards is following the regulatory authorities' requirements by taking into account, for example, market research on anticipated demand, progression routes and candidate take-up. There is clear reference in the plan to early dialogue with the regulatory authorities and support from the relevant sector skills council (SSC) where applicable.
3. If agreement is given for a qualification to be developed a launch campaign plan is developed that details the activities to be carried out and their timelines. The awarding body makes good use of marketing tools such as conferences to launch and support its accredited qualifications.
4. There is no rationale or documented procedure explaining how the awarding body will deal with the withdrawal of qualifications.

Accreditation conditions

2. BSC Awards must have a rationale for considering the withdrawal of qualifications and develop suitable procedures so that candidates are not disadvantaged (*The statutory regulation of external qualifications*, paragraph 44).

Observations

3. BSC Awards may wish to consider developing guidance for staff to assist them in evaluating individual qualification performance. This should include the minimum take-up for a qualification to be considered viable, and the circumstances in which

qualifications should be amended, rewritten or withdrawn from the National Qualifications Framework.

Content and design of qualifications

This is subject to *The statutory regulation of external qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (2004), paragraphs 43, 45–55.

Findings

1. The monitoring team looked at the generic processes in place for developing qualifications, their content and the design of assessment methodology.
2. The awarding body is represented on the National Health and Safety Qualifications Advisory Group (NHSQAG) and works closely with the qualifications development steering committee (QDSC), which is made up of individuals from industry and health and safety experts.
3. The arrangements for developing qualifications are outlined in the *BSC qualification development process*. This is a flow chart indicating the various phases from the initial idea and development of the qualification to the evaluation of the specification if accredited. Each phase identifies the group, committee, teams and/or stakeholders to be consulted. For example, the awarding body enters into early dialogue with the regulatory authorities and discusses the proposed qualification with the relevant SSC at the beginning of the process and at a later stage. However, none of the stages are supported by documented procedures or records.
4. The flow chart indicates that the decision to proceed is given by BSC Awards management. The director of qualifications stated that qualifications development is included on the agenda until formal accreditation is given by QCA. Initial qualification development is authorised by the chief executive of BSC. However, the authorisation process is not documented or formalised and there are no records to support the decisions as minutes of meetings are not taken. In addition it is unclear how the final specification is formally agreed before its submission to the regulatory authorities.
5. A project team led by a qualifications development manager developed the existing accredited qualifications with input from specification-development teams comprising independent health and safety consultants and the QDSC. The qualifications development manager post no longer exists. BSC Awards intends to continue using independent health and safety practitioners when developing future qualifications. For

example, the awarding body has worked with the NHSQAG to develop the specification for the entry-level qualification under development.

6. The monitoring team looked at the project plan used to develop the level 1 and 2 qualifications that were accredited in 2005. It is not clear at what point the project plan was developed, as it is not included in the qualification-development process flow chart. The plan includes a business and strategic case for developing the qualifications with milestones and costs. However, it is not clear if these targets were met or followed, as no records were seen to support the activities.
7. BSC Awards uses external consultants to write the specification, learning outcomes and assessment strategy, taking into account specific SSC requirements where applicable.
8. Proposed specifications are reviewed by the QDSC to ensure that the content, size of units and assessment strategy are fit for purpose. In addition BSC Awards undertook a pilot with its staff using the draft assessment materials for the level 3 certificate in occupational safety and health. The monitoring team is confident from its discussions with awarding body staff that the review process is suitable. However, the review process and its outcomes need to be recorded to promote confidence in the system being used.
9. BSC Awards uses generic titling conventions for qualifications and unit titles. All qualifications are single units apart from level 6. The qualification specifications follow the same format and meet the requirements of the regulatory authorities, including mapping to key skills and the relevant national occupational standards where applicable.
10. BSC Awards uses external assessment for all qualifications but the assessment model used depends on the level of the qualification. The regulatory authorities have accepted the existing assessment models for each of the accredited qualifications. The director of qualifications stated that the type of independent assessment used is relevant to what is being tested in terms of health and safety. For example, level 1 tests a candidate's awareness of health and safety through multiple-choice questions, and level 2 uses a work-based task to test skills. At levels 3 and 6 candidates sit a short-answer examination and complete a risk-assessment task under examination conditions. The latter also includes a 3,000- and 6,000-word assignment with all

components externally marked by examiners appointed and trained by BSC Awards.

11. At the time of the monitoring activity the accredited qualifications were in their infancy and therefore it was not possible to test how BSC Awards takes into account the views of end users when evaluating the performance of its qualifications.

Accreditation conditions

3. BSC Awards must review its qualifications development process so that it is clear how qualification development is authorised, the role of the project plan and how the final specification is agreed. There must be an audit trail of the decision making process supported by documented procedures and suitable records (*The statutory regulation of external qualifications*, paragraph 43).

Observations

4. BSC Awards should have an evaluation process for its accredited qualifications that includes feedback from end users such as centres and candidates, and should take account of this when determining if revisions or amendments are needed.

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. BSC Awards uses independent assessment for all accredited qualifications. The qualification type determines the assessment method used and all levels apart from 3 and 6 are available on demand. The latter are offered at specific venues three times a year.
2. The quality assurance arrangements for managing independent assessment are suitable and include, for example, the retention of candidate work and the re-allocation of examiners' work if assessment decisions are incorrect. It was noted that an assistant examiner's work for one component was re-marked because of inconsistent marking. Examiners are monitored by checking the number of errors in marking at each sitting. As there are only a small number of examiners this is easily managed.
3. The awarding body uses standardisation to ensure that assessments are reliable and the activities are suitably documented. All tasks are devised, set and marked by BSC Awards, and follow a thorough process. Chief examiners write the assessment tasks, questions and mark schemes based on the relevant specification for each qualification. Revisers evaluate the draft tasks, questions and mark schemes to ensure that they cover the full requirements of the specification, and they can recommend changes. Their recommendations and those of the director of qualifications are fed back to the chief examiners for consideration. The chair of examiners makes the final decision and can authorise changes at the question paper evaluation committee (QPEC).
4. Examiners trial mark five live scripts before the standardisation meeting, applying the mark scheme and making comments as required. At the meeting these scripts are re-marked and each answer discussed where there are variances to ensure a consistent approach. The amended mark scheme is forwarded to the assistant examiners. A member of the monitoring team observed a standardisation meeting for the level 3

certificate in occupational safety and health, and is confident that the procedures used produce reliable results. It was also noted that the variance in marks between the assistant examiners and chief examiner prior to any discussions was minimal for the majority of questions.

5. Assistant examiners whose five scripts meet the requirements mark a further four scripts from their allocation and a common script. These are returned to the chief examiner for first-phase sampling. If marking is within the tolerance levels they are given verbal feedback and/or clearance to mark the remaining scripts. The director of qualifications stated that the tolerance level was plus or minus three to four marks out of 144. All scripts with a variance greater than 4 would be recalled and marked by the chief examiner.
6. Second-phase sampling is carried out when all marked scripts have been returned to the awarding body and this sample is selected by the awarding body officer. The chief examiner over-marks these scripts to monitor the consistency of marking. Assistant examiners receive feedback on their performance when all selected scripts have been through the process. Additional checks on mathematical accuracy are carried out at head office before the final results are agreed.
7. Chief examiners write a report on each examination sitting for levels 3 and 6. The January 2006 reports gave a breakdown of how well candidates performed in each question and covered general issues such as how candidates failed to read questions properly or follow command words such as 'outline' (for example 'outline four reasons why...'). This issue was apparent during the observed standardisation meeting where a candidate had responded to a specific question with more reasons than requested. While the issue was resolved BSC Awards needs to ensure that candidates understand they may not gain full credit if command words are not followed accurately.
8. There are robust arrangements to ensure the security of examination materials, and papers are either printed in-house or outsourced. At the development stage draft papers are emailed as password-protected documents to examiners and committees. Final examination question papers for level 3 and 6 are securely packed with combination locks and couriered to a named person at the venue 48 hours before the examination. A senior invigilator is responsible for the locked case, which is opened in front of the candidates. Completed scripts and papers are returned to BSC Awards

by courier the same day.

9. Clear instructions for the security of level 1 and 2 examination papers are explained in the centre handbook for each qualification. The awarding body carries out spot checks to ensure that examination regulations such as checking the identity of candidates are complied with.
10. All specifications are written in English and BSC Awards has not had any requests for Welsh or Gaelige. The awarding body stated that it is prepared to translate materials if there is sufficient demand.
11. BSC Awards allows assessment in other languages if requested. The multiple-choice question paper for the level 1 certificate in health and safety at work has been translated into Polish. The monitoring team is confident that given the type and practical nature of the paper suitable controls are in place to ensure the comparability of assessment across languages for this qualification.

Accreditation conditions

There are no accreditation conditions for this section.

Observations

5. BSC Awards should ensure that candidates understand they may not gain full credit if command words used in examinations are not followed correctly.

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 awarding process varies according to the level of the qualification. This report has focused on the awarding process used for the level 3 certificate in occupational safety and health.
2. BSC Awards has suitable and robust arrangements, supported by documented procedures, for determining and reporting results. Awarding is a formal process involving the determination of grade boundaries, aggregation and confirmation of results. The monitoring team is confident from discussions with awarding body staff that the chief and assistant examiners are experts in their field.
3. The chair of examiners and the chief examiner are responsible for ensuring that standards are comparable over time. A notional pass standard was approved by IOSH as meeting its required standards and is used during the awarding process.
4. Initial grade boundaries for component 1 are recommended by the chief examiner at the awarding meeting and take account of statistics of previous candidate performance. Marked scripts for each grade boundary from previous examination sessions are used to determine the grade boundaries. The monitoring team noted that as these qualifications are relatively new, statistical data was only available from two examination sessions. Component 2 in level 3 and 6 is a risk-assessment task with fixed grade boundaries for pass, merit and distinction.
5. The awarding process follows that recommended by the Joint Council for Qualifications in *GCSE, GCE, VCE, GNVQ and AEA code of practice 2006/7*. The range of marks is worked out for each grade boundary in component 1 starting with the pass/fail boundary. The same process is repeated for distinction, and the merit boundary is established as midway between the two. Once grade boundaries are set for component 1 the grade boundary for the whole unit is established using a pair of indicators. A member of the monitoring team observed the process, which is very thorough.

6. BSC Awards has systems in place to adjust marks if errors are identified or if assessments are not accurate and consistent. One set of scripts was re-marked by the chief examiner because the marking of one component was too harsh. A breaches register, which lists any errors highlighted during the awarding process, is also kept. For example, a rubric error was found in one paper and the examiners were instructed to adjust their marking accordingly.
7. Information on the grading boundaries and aggregation for each qualification if applicable is stated in the relevant specification available on the BSC Awards website and in hard copy. Results for the two components at level 3 are reported separately to assist any candidate wishing to resit the examination.

Accreditation conditions

There are no accreditation conditions for this section.

Observations

There are no observations for this section.

Registration

This is subject to *The statutory regulation of external qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (2004), paragraphs 11 and 12.

Findings

1. BSC Awards registers centres as venues for examinations at level 1 only. Centres receive the *Registered centre handbook*, which details their roles and responsibilities including the requirement to have a single named point of accountability. Inspection visits were initiated in April 2006 to check that the facilities for and conduct of examinations at these centres complied with BSC Awards' requirements. Level 2 qualifications are assessed via workplace-based tasks. Examinations at levels 3 and 6 can be taken at one of the awarding body's six national venues.
2. Candidates are registered in different ways depending on the level of the qualification. For levels 2, 3 and 6 candidates can book their assessments online and are registered on a database that generates a lifetime unique nine-digit number. Candidates for level 1 examinations are booked in a block by centres and candidate data is recorded post-examination.
3. The monitoring team noted that the booking form for levels 3 and 6 has terms and conditions that include the requirement that candidates have followed a training course at an approved BSC Awards provider to be eligible for the examination. This could be seen as a barrier to assessment.

Accreditation conditions

4. BSC Awards must ensure that its terms and conditions for assessment do not create unnecessary barriers to achievement for candidates (*The statutory regulations of external qualifications*, paragraph 9b).

Observations

There are no observations for this section.