



Qualifications and
Curriculum Authority

Post-accreditation monitoring report: ETC Awards Ltd (ETCAL)

January 2006

QCA/06/2317

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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)
- Awdurdod Cymwysterau, Cwricwlwm ac Asesu Cymru/the Qualifications, Curriculum and Assessment Authority for Wales (ACCAC)¹
- the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA), the authority 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 a post-monitoring activity carried out with the Engineering Training Council Awards Ltd (ETCAL) awarding body. The monitoring was carried out by QCA on behalf of the regulatory authorities in August and September 2005.

This is the third post-accreditation monitoring activity report on ETCAL's arrangements for its delivery of NVQ-accredited qualifications.

¹ On 1 April 2006 ACCAC will merge with the Welsh Assembly to form the new Department of Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills (DELLS).

This report looks at the operations in respect of NVQ provision organised and managed by ETCAL. The assessment of these qualifications is by competence-based assessment and requires appropriately qualified individuals working in assessment centres to ensure that standards are met. The awarding body maintains control of the process through an external verification process.

ETCAL completed the awarding body update process during May to September 2005. Therefore the following report only relates to sections of *The statutory regulation of external qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (2004) and *The NVQ code of practice* (2002) that refer to:

- resources and expertise
- application of the assessment methods, looking at centre registration/approval, data requirements and monitoring of external verifiers.

About Engineering Training Council Awards Ltd (ETCAL)

ETCAL follows the guidance provided by the relevant sector body in relation to the independent assessment of its qualifications (*The statutory regulation of external qualifications*, paragraphs 13, 36, 38–42, 56–58 and 63–67).

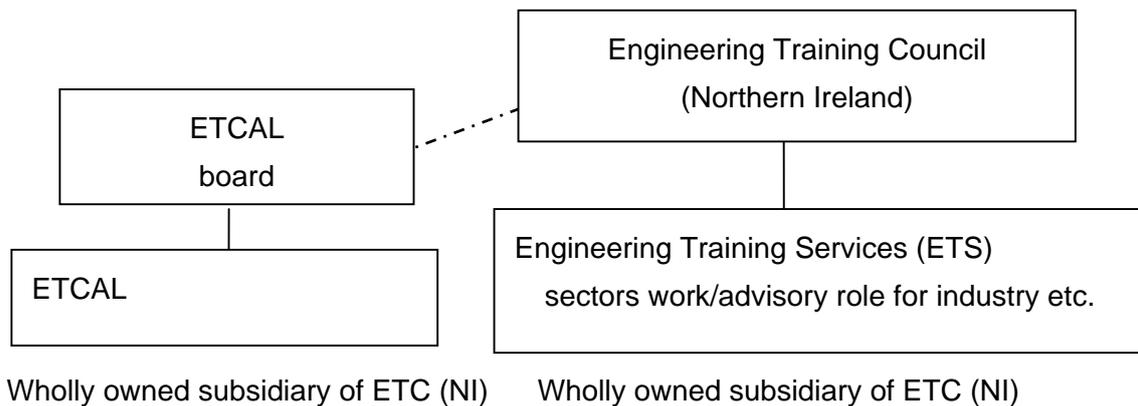
Background

On 1 January 2001 Engineering Training Council Awards Ltd (ETCAL) came into being as the result of a separation of the functions within the Engineering Training Council (Northern Ireland) or ETCNI. The following is the published mission statement:

ETC Awards Limited is dedicated to the engineering/manufacturing industry in Northern Ireland for the sole purpose of helping investment in its future by providing a means through which National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) can be assessed.

The awards offered by ETCAL focus on the engineering and production industry requirements in Northern Ireland. It also offers key skills in relation to these awards and modern apprenticeships.

The following diagram identifies the organisations mentioned in this report.



EAL and ETCAL have an accord whereby EAL offers engineering NVQs in England and Wales and ETCAL offers the equivalent qualifications in Northern Ireland. Neither of the awarding bodies works within the other's territory unless agreed.

Resources and expertise

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

Findings

1. The organisation works from offices in Belfast, Northern Ireland, plus an office facility in the northwest of the country and staff are provided with computer and communication equipment sufficient to allow them to carry out their job roles. The monitoring team found these facilities and physical resources to be satisfactory for ETCAL's current level of activity.
2. There has been a change in staff structure and personnel since the previous monitoring activities. In order to ensure that prospective staff met the skills and expertise requirements for the organisation, job specifications were drawn up and used for recruitment purposes.
3. All members of staff have an annual performance review. ETCAL is committed to the development of its staff, notably because individual staff members are required to fulfil a number of roles, such as external verification and assisting with the development of qualifications.
4. Until recently ETCAL staff consisted of the awarding body manager and two others, with an administrator who had other duties apart from the awarding body. All three full time staff undertake external verifier roles as part of their responsibilities. Two further members of awarding body staff have now been appointed who will also act as external verifiers. These additional resources will allow the awarding body manager to reduce the amount of external verification he carries out in order to focus on a more strategic role.
5. Both new staff members are technically expert but need to achieve the relevant assessing and verifying qualifications, and have been registered with another awarding body to undertake the V2 qualification.
6. As part of their training, the new external verifiers are being accompanied on external verification visits by the qualified members of the team who countersign their decisions. Further training and standardisation for the whole team is achieved through attendance at monthly external verifier meetings.
7. Centres are allocated to external verifiers randomly, although location and centre type is sometimes taken into consideration. All external verifiers have signed a code of practice, which includes a requirement to declare any conflict of interest with centres.

Accreditation conditions

There are no accreditation conditions for this section.

Observations

There are no observations for this section.

Application of internal assessment methods

These are subject to *The statutory regulation of external qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (2004), paragraphs 11, 13, 36, 56, 57, 59–62.

Findings

1. There are procedures in place for dealing with potential and prospective centres. Guidance is provided at a number of levels and centres may receive a visit to assist with the identification of a suitable qualification for their candidates.
2. The centre coordinator is required to complete a centre approval application form that requires the identification of systems, procedures, staff and resources to meet the requirements of the qualification in question. These forms are used as the basis for an approval visit by the appointed external verifier. The centre may start operating after an approval visit provided that no major actions are required. Centres are provided with a folder containing ETCAL policies and procedures and are also given a compact disk holding the forms to be used. This information is also available on the website and ETCAL produces an e-magazine to keep centres informed on developments and initiatives.
3. As part of the resources required, centres must identify appropriately occupationally competent staff to be assessors and verifiers. It is a requirement that these individuals have or are willing to obtain the A and V qualifications appropriate to their role. ETCAL supports centres in appointing their assessors and internal verifiers by publishing selection criteria, providing a training course and assisting trainees in building their portfolios.
4. For some qualifications offered by ETCAL, assessors may only be required to achieve A2, which is agreed at approval. Existing assessors and internal verifiers who hold the D32/33 or D34 are required to be familiar with the demands of the A1/2 or V1. ETCAL intends to run a programme of conversion courses, although no programme had been developed at the time of the monitoring activity.
5. At some centres visited, the monitoring team saw ETCAL course attendance certificates that centre staff believed were sufficient to demonstrate assessor or verifier competence and achievement of the qualification. As a result of this confusion, the monitoring team found that at three out of the four centres visited, internal verifiers were not qualified and had all been in the job role beyond the 18 months deadline for achievement of the qualification. There was evidence to show that each person had attended the training day and been provided with the criteria to be met.

6. Unqualified assessors and internal verifiers are not being identified through external verifier visits. Also, the awarding body's candidate tracking system is not highlighting candidates' progress (or lack of it) towards the A and V qualifications through the monitoring process. The whole registration, assessment and certification process for the A and V qualifications needs to be reviewed by the awarding body to ensure that they are meeting the requirements of *The statutory regulation of external qualifications* and *The NVQ code of practice*.
7. ETCAL provides centres with a list of qualifications for which they are approved. However, the monitoring team found that the awarding body included the A and V qualifications on this list if the centre had staff in the process of taking the A and V qualifications. The monitoring team were concerned that centres would consider this as an indication of approval to deliver these qualifications and sought agreement from the awarding body that this information would be indicated in a different way on the sheet provided to centres.
8. Each assessor and internal verifier registered with ETCAL is provided with a licence number that is used to identify them within the assessment process.
9. The ETCAL staff interviewed stated that all centres are informed of the requirement to countersign the decisions of trainee assessors and internal verifiers and that there are written procedures in place. However, there was no evidence of any countersigning being undertaken at the centres visited and external verifiers are not checking this at monitoring visits.
10. Relevant specifications are provided to ETCAL approved centres and all involved in the assessment process have access to the full specification for the qualifications they are assessing. Approved centres also receive advice on appropriate assessment methods, but if a centre wishes to use other assessment methods these have to be approved by ETCAL in advance.
11. Guidance on record keeping is provided to centres and records are being kept, but the amount and type of records varied at the centres visited and they were not clear about the length of time records should be kept.
12. ETCAL has recently produced a form to assist centres in the recording of internal meetings such as standardisation and verification, although any format of recording is acceptable. However the centres visited had minimal arrangements for standardising internal verifiers and assessors, and records of internal meetings were not being kept in all centres. It is accepted that it can be difficult for centres to arrange meetings, but ETCAL must be assured that assessment decisions and practices are standardised in centres and across their assessment sites.

13. To check authenticity, ETCAL requires certificate claims to be signed by the internal verifier and the external verifier allocated to the centre. At centres where the internal verifier is unqualified, the external verifier signs the form to ensure that a qualified person is verifying the claims. However, in such cases, this means that there is no independent review as the external verifier is assuming the role of the internal verifier by countersigning and confirming the decisions made. Also it was not clear whether the external verifier fulfils the role of the internal verifier. Therefore ETCAL needs to put procedures in place to deal with these situations and ensure some level of independent scrutiny of the assessment process.
14. ETCAL operates a direct claims status for centres that have met certain criteria set out in the policy provided to centres. Centres lose this status if they cease to meet the required standard. Centres are required to advise ETCAL of changes to staff as this could change their status and ability to offer the NVQs as occupational competence is required.
15. The team of external verifiers is managed and monitored by the awarding body manager through monthly external verifier update meetings, minutes of which were made available to the monitoring team. Each external verifier is also accompanied on two visits per year. The awarding body manager selects these at short notice and review sheets are completed on the performance seen.
16. The monitoring team found that staff at centres visited and external verifiers interviewed are aware of the tariff of sanctions and any sanctions imposed are monitored and discussed at the ETCAL monthly external verifier meetings.
17. ETCAL staff stated that every centre receives two quality assurance visits each year but could also receive separate external verification visits for the purposes of verifying certificate claims. Each external verifier has an individual visit plan and the awarding body manager checks these to ensure they are up to date. However, there is no overall centre visit monitoring strategy in place to ensure that all centres with active candidates receive the required two quality assurance visits per year.
18. One centre visited by the monitoring team had not received an external verifier visit since December 2002. ETCAL staff stated that the centre had undergone staff changes and that as candidate progress was slow it had been deemed as inactive. The monitoring team found no records to confirm this but did identify that the centre has registered candidates, therefore should be considered active. Although some contact has been made with the centre there are no fully completed external verification records. When reviewing centre files at ETCAL offices, the monitoring team found further evidence of centres not receiving the minimum number of annual visits.

19. External verifiers sample completed portfolios at centres. The number looked at can range from 10 per cent to 100 per cent depending on the level of activity, size and type of the centre.
20. The current ETCAL external verifier report form does not prompt the external verifier to check for sufficient detail to ensure compliance with *The NVQ code of practice* and as such ETCAL external verifiers cannot confirm that centres meet or continue to meet the approved centre criteria.

Accreditation conditions

1. ETCAL must require centres to ensure that the individuals appointed to perform the internal verification function hold appropriate internal verifier qualifications as approved, and specified by, the regulatory authorities within 18 months of commencing their role. (*The NVQ code of practice*, paragraph 39, bullet point 1.)
2. ETCAL must require centres to ensure that the individuals appointed to perform the assessor function hold appropriate assessor qualifications as approved, and specified by, the regulatory authorities within 18 months of commencing their role. (*The NVQ code of practice*, paragraph 27, bullet point 1.)
3. ETCAL must ensure that decisions of uncertified assessors and internal verifiers are checked, authenticated and countersigned by a qualified person. (*The NVQ code of practice*, paragraphs 28–30, 40–41.)
4. Where the external verifier becomes the internal verifier in exceptional circumstances ETCAL must ensure that the decisions and work of the external verifier are subject to independent scrutiny by a different external verifier and evidence must be provided to show the effectiveness of these arrangements. (*The NVQ code of practice*, paragraph 44.)
5. ETCAL must ensure that the list of qualifications a centre is approved to offer does not include the A and V qualifications unless the centre can meet the approval requirements for these qualifications. (*The NVQ code of practice*, paragraphs 27, 39.)
6. ETCAL must visit centres approved to offer its qualifications in line with the criteria in the code of practice. (*The NVQ code of practice*, paragraph 59.)
7. ETCAL must review their external verifier report form to ensure it provides the external verifier with sufficient information and opportunity to check the centre's compliance with the approved centre criteria. (*The NVQ code of practice*, paragraphs 51, 56, 64–69.)

8. ETCAL must provide centres with updated guidance that specifies which records are to be maintained and require centres to retain specified records for a minimum of three years. (*The NVQ code of practice*, paragraphs 47–50, *The statutory regulation of external qualifications*, page 22, paragraph 61a.)

9. ETCAL must ensure that centres through their internal verifiers are required to establish procedures to develop a common interpretation and application of national occupational standards to ensure that assessors are consistent in their approach. (*The NVQ code of practice*, paragraph 25–27, 36–38.)

Observations

There are no observations for this section.