



# **Awarding body monitoring report for: English Speaking Board (International) Ltd (ESB)**

---

May 2009

Ofqual/09/4637



# Contents

Introduction .....	4
Regulating external qualifications.....	4
Banked documents .....	4
About this report .....	5
About ESB .....	5
Corporate governance.....	6
Findings .....	6
Accreditation conditions.....	7
Observations.....	7
Resources and expertise.....	8
Findings .....	8
Accreditation conditions.....	9
Observations.....	9
Qualifications development: planning .....	10
Findings .....	10
Accreditation conditions.....	10
Observations.....	10
Qualifications development: content and design of qualifications .....	11
Findings .....	11
Accreditation conditions.....	12
Observations.....	12
Quality assurance and the qualifications development process.....	13
Findings .....	13
Accreditation conditions.....	13
Observations.....	13
Quality assurance and control of internal and independent assessment.....	14
Findings .....	14
Accreditation conditions.....	15
Observations.....	15

## **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' them 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 English Speaking Board (ESB) awarding body and was carried out by Ofqual on behalf of the regulators in March 2009. It draws together the regulator's findings on the five-day accreditation process.

This is the second post-accreditation monitoring activity on ESB'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 initial five-day submission, a self-assessment return and scrutiny of the ESB website. The monitoring team visited ESB's head office to conduct interviews with staff and review documentation. They also observed a training event for examiners to check how the awarding body's quality assurance systems worked in practice.

## **About ESB**

ESB provides access to a range of vocationally related qualifications in the language and ESOL sector. For more information on ESB and the qualifications it offers visit the ESB website at [www.esb.org.uk](http://www.esb.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 no changes to the structure, ownership or legal identity of the awarding body since the previous monitoring activity in 2004. The chief executive is the single named point of accountability for maintaining the quality and standards of the qualifications. This is a dual role with responsibility for the day-to-day operation of the awarding body and as the chief examiner.
2. The governance and lines of reporting are clear. The Board of Trustees has a strategic overview of ESB as an organisation including membership. Trustees are co-opted or elected by the members of ESB but do not have to be actual members of ESB. The Board of Trustees meets quarterly. At each meeting the chief executive and heads of department present reports. The monitoring team noted the detailed information about each area of work informing the trustees of current and future issues affecting the awarding body. This is good practice.
3. Strategic objectives are built into an overall plan developed by the chief executive in consultation with heads of department. The plan is then approved by the Board of Trustees and placed on the intranet so that all staff have access to it. Copies are also sent to the moderators.
4. There are two groups that support the work of the awarding body: the Academic Board and the Qualifications Advisory Team (QAT). The latter is at an early stage of development. Its current role will be linked to the transfer of existing qualifications onto the QCF rather than the development of new qualifications.
5. The Academic Board has responsibility for the overall quality assurance of ESB's provision. For example it reviews qualification take up and deals with complaints or appeals if the decision of the chief examiner is not accepted by an appellant. The chief executive confirmed that the Academic Board will have a role in the development of future qualifications.
6. The chief executive confirmed that there is a partnership arrangement with the University of Lancashire (UCLaN) to offer accredited qualifications in Greece. Scrutiny of these arrangements raised some concerns. Firstly it is not clear if the partnership arrangement is between ESB and UCLaN or ESB and additional partners. Secondly the institutional

agreement states that UCLaN is the sole validating authority for the examinations. It appears that ESB's role is to ensure the rigor of UCLaN's moderation procedures, monitor standardisation meetings, attend assessment boards and monitor examination centres. The existing arrangements do not include any guarantee that UCLaN will comply with the regulatory criteria or how ESB will monitor UCLaN's compliance with the statutory regulations. While UCLaN is currently registering candidates and issuing ESB certificates it is not clear if UCLaN is following ESB's procedures for these activities. ESB needs to review these arrangements to ensure the statutory requirements are met and that they are in full control of the accredited qualifications.

7. The monitoring team was given full access to awarding body documentation, including the strategic objectives, minutes of meetings, reports and banked documents. ESB had organised the documentation very clearly so that information was readily available.

### **Accreditation conditions**

1. ESB must review the existing partnership arrangements with UCLaN and guarantee UCLaN's compliance with the statutory regulations. In addition, ESB must have overall control of the accredited qualifications with particular reference to registration and certification (*The statutory regulation of external qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (2004)*, paragraph 5e).

### **Observations**

1. ESB is reminded to review and update the banked documents as agreed with the monitoring team.

## 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. ESB has sufficient financial, technical and staffing resources to support the qualifications it offers in the UK. However ESB also works with UCLaN for qualifications delivered in Greece and visits these centres overseas. An ESB manager takes responsibility for attending the UCLaN board meetings and for quality assurance issues but it was not possible to test fully if ESB has sufficient resources to support this activity.
2. There is a documented staff appraisal system in place for head office staff. ESB recently conducted an independent skills audit of its staff identifying skills gaps and the additional training required. This is good practice. Senior and administrative staff attend meetings run by the Federation of Awarding Bodies and QCA workshops to keep up to date with current practices.
3. The procedures for recruiting, appointing and training contracted staff are suitable. ESB has a panel of examiners (assessors). Applicants are not accepted onto the panel until they have successfully completed the induction and training programme. Potential assessors attend a two day induction that includes the use of DVD scenarios to standardise marking. A member of the monitoring team observed an induction event and was satisfied with the systems used. Potential assessors are assigned a mentor (usually a moderator) who oversees the training activities and provides feedback on their performance. Once a minimum of three observations are completed and the assessor's marking is satisfactory the trainee is approved for release onto the active panel. At this point they will be observed by a member of the moderator panel who may or may not be their mentor. A final report on their performance with recommendations on suitability for the panel is sent to the chief examiner. A sample of these reports was looked at by the regulators.
4. The awarding body runs an annual training session for existing assessors. This includes standardisation of actual performance. Assessors mark a performance from a DVD prior to the meeting and the results are discussed by the chief examiner and moderators. Any specific issues identified in assessing are raised with the chief examiner who may offer additional training. Current assessors are required to commit to a specific number of days and if they do not meet their commitment they are placed on the reserve panel.



5. If ESB does not have sufficient in-house expertise additional staff or consultants are appointed. Statistical analysis is used to measure the consistency of standards over time.
6. Since its last monitoring activity ESB has introduced new information technology systems that have reduced the need for paper storage and increased office space. Nevertheless, the awarding body continues to seek larger premises.
7. Data is well protected with off-site back-ups as routine protection and disaster recovery plans are in place.

### **Accreditation conditions**

There are no accreditation conditions for this section.

### **Observations**

2. ESB should review the existing resources for working with UCLaN so that it is confident it can meet the statutory regulations for the qualifications offered through UCLaN.

## Qualifications development: planning

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

### Findings

1. ESB has a plan of provision outlining the qualifications to be offered from 2008 to 2009. The awarding body has not developed any new qualifications since 2006.
2. The ESB flowchart of market research process showed the stages of market research in the qualifications development process. It showed various stages from the initial idea to full accreditation. The monitoring team considers that evidence of Sector Skills Council or employer support should appear in the earlier stages before the full specification is developed.
3. The Academic Board reviews qualifications that are already available in order to minimise excess provision. If the idea is considered worth pursuing a consultant is contracted to write the learning outcomes. These are then put out to consultation with interested parties.
4. ESB explained how it would withdraw a live accredited qualification and protect the interests of candidates, but there are no formal arrangements in place.

### Accreditation conditions

2. ESB must develop a procedure for the withdrawal of live accredited qualifications (*The statutory regulation of external qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (2004)*, paragraph 44).

### Observations

3. ESB should review the qualifications development flow chart so that the content and design of qualifications are included.

## 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 45–55.

### Findings

1. ESB has a number of accredited qualifications in the national qualifications framework. The awarding body explained that while the content of existing qualifications is unlikely to change, tasks may be amended through the review process. Changes to tasks are detailed on the website through frequently asked questions. If new units/qualifications were developed ESB said it would use a subject specialist to determine the content and learning outcomes.
2. The chief executive explained the processes used for developing the qualifications in oral skills for interviews but it was not possible to test the robustness of the systems used.
3. ESB has documented procedures explaining how units will be developed, revised and how rules of combination are agreed for the QCF. The monitoring team noted that the latter was a draft version. Both procedures explain each stage of the process. However, these procedures could not be tested as ESB is concentrating on their QCF application and is not currently developing new units or qualifications.
4. According to the above procedures the QAT will play a major role in reviewing, developing and implementing new qualifications. There are clear terms of reference but membership of the QAT will be fluid depending on the subject area covered. The effectiveness of these arrangements could not be tested as the QAT has not yet been implemented.
5. The awarding body has employed a consultant to convert existing units into the QCF format and assign credit and level. As part of this process the consultant reviews assessment methods and content, checks levelling and ensures that the components meet the aims of the unit. Once the initial credit value has been estimated specifications are sent to the chief executive and a subject specialist for checking.
6. All qualifications are mapped to the national occupational standards and key skills where applicable. The monitoring team was satisfied with the system used to determine credit values but could not test this as the units are not live or in the QCF bank.
7. ESB offers some graded qualifications and is working with other awarding bodies to determine, size, level and credit value for those qualifications.

### **Accreditation conditions**

There are no accreditation conditions for this section.

### **Observations**

There are no observations for this section.

## Quality assurance and the qualifications development process

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

### Findings

1. ESB has procedures for qualifications and unit development some of which are still under development. However, it is not clear what quality assurance checks are carried out at which stage of the process or by whom to ensure that the procedures will be applied consistently to each qualification or unit developed. In addition, there are no timeframes or milestones indicating how the qualifications process is tracked. The monitoring team acknowledges that ESB is making progress in developing its procedures for the QCF. ESB will have to consider how the milestones at each stage of the process will be monitored, checked and tracked.
2. The stages of the qualification and unit development process are shown on a flow chart. One of the stages indicates that the qualification/unit will be submitted to the regulators for accreditation. It is not clear who signs off the qualification or checks that the documentation is complete. ESB staff stated that the consultant and quality assurance manager are responsible for checking all documentation prior to the qualification/unit launch.
3. The monitoring team noted ESB's procedures to ensure ongoing compliance with regulatory arrangements, which explain its self-assessment procedures and risk management policy.

### Accreditation conditions

There are no accreditation conditions for this section.

### Observations

4. ESB should identify the quality assurance checks to ensure robust qualifications and units and include a final signing-off process for each qualification/unit developed.

## Quality assurance and control of internal and 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 56–62.

### Findings

1. Most of ESB's accredited qualifications are orally assessed and independently examined by an ESB assessor. Tasks include responding to oral questions, presentations, aural exercises and role play or other interaction with fellow candidates. In written examinations the candidates may be asked to complete forms of the kind used in their chosen field of work. Written multiple-choice question papers are also used.
2. All assessment is in English. By the nature of its work, ESB displays a keen sense of appropriate and plain language for its assessments. Exemplar work is provided to assessors and moderators in DVD format during training events.
3. ESB has suitable quality assurance arrangements in place that include, for example, the retention of candidate work, avoiding conflicts of interest and the deployment and moderation of assessors.
4. Much assessment is difficult to moderate because the moderator cannot see the original work that was assessed. However, ESB spends considerable time ensuring that its assessors understand the assessment criteria and mark schemes. ESB resources standardisation events to ensure assessors work in the same way as far as possible. Since the previous monitoring activity ESB has reduced the number of assessors to ensure the consistency of standards.
5. Moderators check 10% of the written assessment records to ensure that the narrative fits the mark awarded. Mark schemes are provided but are generic. This is because given the nature of the examination the candidate response is varied. The regulators were satisfied that ESB has suitable arrangements to monitor the work of its assessors and moderators.
6. Where written examinations are involved the regulators were satisfied that ESB produced the mark schemes and assessment material at the same time. All assessment tasks and mark schemes were independently checked by people not involved in their development. In all circumstances, ESB has suitable arrangements to avoid potential conflicts of interest.

7. Security is not always an issue for assessments given the oral nature of some assessments. Where it is required, ESB has specified the requirements and carried out checks on its partner, UCLaN, in 2008.
8. The regulators were satisfied that the amount of evidence provided by candidates was sufficient to prove competence. However, the requirements for candidate identification were delegated to the examination venues without clear guidelines on the documents required as sufficient proof of identity. ESB must remedy this weakness.

### **Accreditation conditions**

3. ESB must ensure that it states the documentation required for candidates to prove their identity and that adequate checks are introduced to monitor these requirements at examination venues (*The statutory regulation of external qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (2004)*, paragraph 57a).

### **Observations**

There are no observations for this section.