Post-accreditation monitoring report:

Engineering Construction Industry Training Board (ECITB)

March 2006

QCA/06/2671

Contents

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.

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[1] On 1 April 2006 ACCAC will merge with the Welsh Assembly Government to become the new Department for Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills (DELLS).

About this report

This report is the outcome of a post-accreditation monitoring activity carried out on the Engineering Construction Industry Training Board (ECITB) by QCA on behalf of the regulatory authorities in March 2006. It draws together the regulatory authorities' findings on the resources and expertise available to support the delivery of its National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs), ECITB's arrangements for the quality assurance and control of internal assessment, and the level of customer service offered.

This is the third post-accreditation monitoring activity on ECITB's activities. The previous work focused on the systems and procedures in place to support the delivery of its NVQs.

Consultants visited five centres, interviewing staff and candidates, reviewing portfolios, examining records, collecting information on customer service satisfaction and the approved centre criteria to see how ECITB manages the quality assurance and control of internal assessment. These centres were chosen from different geographic regions to ensure a cross-section of external verifiers and centres by size and type. The findings from these visits were collated and the issues identified followed up with the awarding body.

About the Engineering Construction Industry Training Board (ECITB)

ECITB provides access to a range of National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) and Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQs) in specific sector areas, such as engineering construction. For more information on ECITB and the qualifications it offers visit the ECITB website at www.ecitb.org.uk.

Resources and expertise

This is subject to the *NVQ code of practice* (2001), paragraphs 35, 52(part), 53, 54(part), 55, 57) and *The statutory regulation of external qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (2004), paragraphs 8, 10, 97e and 98.

Findings

1. ECITB has sufficient staff at its head office to deal with the registration and certification of candidates, and the development of quality assurance arrangements. The monitoring team noted that annual appraisals are carried out on both office staff and contracted staff such as external verifiers. The appraisals focus on performance, continuing professional development (CPD) and adherance to contracts known as the *Agreement for the provision of services for contracted staff.*

2. The awarding body requires its assessors and internal and external verifiers to have the knowledge, skills and experience as stated in the current assessment stategy. In addition, assessors and internal verifiers attend a two-day induction course, which is also available online (with tutor support). They are required to complete specific assignments relating to the content and evidence requirements of their relevant qualifications and the wider context of the NVQ system. The monitoring team examined the programme and considered this to be good practice, enabling assessors and internal verifiers to understand the NVQ system more effectively and meet the awarding body's requirements for quality assurance.

3. ECITB has eight qualified external verifiers operating across specific geographic regions with responsibility for between one and 11 centres. While external verifier files are maintained with details of the achievement of D35 or V2 and annual appraisals, there is no single register enabling ECITB to track achievement within the 12-month timeframe if unqualified external verifiers are recruited. It is also unclear how ECITB tracks its requirements for external verifiers to hold a contractor's safety passport and insurance cover. It is an industry requirement that they have suitable public liability insurance.

4. The awarding body has developed an *External verifier code of practice* (January 2003) identifying the roles and responsibilities of external verifiers, personal conduct and probity which requires them to declare any conflicts of interest. However, there is no reference to the appeals process if centres disagree with an external verifier's decision. External verifiers are not required to sign that they will work to the code of practice within their contracts. These are reviewed annually. Additional and more detailed roles and responsibilities for external verifiers are described in the newly developed *Role profile* and identify compliance with the code of practice as a requirement.

5. External verifiers are expected to attend a minimum of one approved centre network meeting and two external verifier development days per year. Attendance is monitored via the annual appraisal system and the requirement is also written into the contract. External verifiers receive up-dated information on the systems and procedures to be used on behalf of ECITB at the development workshops.

Accreditation conditions

1. ECITB must maintain a register of external verifiers that details their compliance in meeting awarding body requirements, such as CPD and the achievement of V2. (*NVQ code of practice,* paragraph 54.

2. ECITB must revise the existing *External verifier code of practice* so that it meets the regulatory requirements in full and includes reference to appeals against external verifier's decisions. External verifiers must confirm in writing that they will work to the requirements of the revised code of practice*.* (*NVQ code of practice*, paragraph 55.)

Observations

There are no observations for this section.

The quality assurance and control of internal assessment

This is subject to the *NVQ code of practice* (2001), paragraphs 22–33, 36–51, 52 (part), 54(part), 56, 58 (part), 59–65, 66 (part), 67–69 and *The statutory regulation of external qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (2004), paragraphs 13, 36, 56, 57 and 59–62.

Findings

1. ECITB provides centres with its *Quality assurance procedures manual* (version 5 2005), and award-specific guidance packs for centres and candidates including the standard setting body's assessment strategy. Details of the responsibilities of assessors and internal verifiers, the specification for assessment and the awarding body's requirements on maintaining records are included within this documentation. All centres confirmed access to these documents. In addition, external verifiers and internal verifiers are provided with a *Code of practice*.

2. The requirements for assessors and internal verifiers are included within the assessment strategy. All assessors and internal verifiers have to be registered with the awarding body by the centres they work for, providing details of their occupational expertise and qualifications, and must hold or achieve A or V units within 18 months. ECITB has also introduced the use of expert witnesses in the workplace and while they must be registered they are not required to have A units. The requirements for the countersigning of the decisions of unqualified staff are detailed in the manual. No certificates can be issued unless registered staff have carried out assessment and internal verification, and their decisions have been countersigned if necessary. The achievement of A and V units and countersigning was not identified as an issue at any of the centres visited.

3. The awarding body requires centre personnel to inform them of any staff changes such as the internal verifier leaving, and this is clearly stated in the *Quality assurance procedures manual*. However, three of the centres visited were unsure of this requirement.

4. The nature and type of acceptable evidence is included in the assessment strategy. All ECITB's qualifications are NVQs and evidence is collected using a variety of assessment methods such as observation, witness testimonies and questioning. Simulation is permitted in certain circumstances and centres are required to agree all simulations with their external verifier.

5. Guidance on the assessment records that centres must keep is in the *Quality assurance procedures manual* and ECITB has developed new documentation for recording assessment. The new assessment documentation includes a single written declaration signed by the assessor, candidate and internal verifier on completion of the award. However, the operations manager stated that if candidates have more than one assessor then a declaration must be in the portfolio for each assessor. It was not possible to fully test this at the time of the monitoring activity as only one centre visited had introduced the new documentation.

6. Centres are provided with information on the requirements of internal verification and centres receive an *Internal verifier code of practice.* Although documented internal verification procedures are a condition of centre approval there is evidence from the visits undertaken that centres are not complying fully with this requirement. Only one of the centres visited had a documented internal verification policy but this had not been implemented as it was under revision. The monitoring team examined the draft policy and noted that the centre had developed systems to ensure that internal verification was planned over an 18-month period so that all units would be sampled across all assessors and candidates.

7. The main issue for ECITB is that not all centres are complying with its requirements to keep suitable records that demonstrate that internal verification is taking place throughout the assessment process. Evidence from centre visits suggests that some of the internal verification records were difficult to track and did not include a matrix giving an overall picture of the internal verification sampling strategy. In addition recording systems and methodology for internal verification vary across internal verifiers and appear to be heavily reliant on portfolio review. It usually takes place at the end of the programme and no clear documented sampling rationale is used. In some cases internal verifiers are carrying out 100 per cent verification of all units and internal verification records are kept in the candidate portfolio with no central record or matrix enabling the

centre to establish which units or assessment methods have been sampled over time. The awarding body needs to be proactive and provide centres with more guidance on the degree of internal verification sampling required so that centres are consistent in their approach.

8. The database at one centre only recorded dates of internal verification on completion of the qualification. Therefore, it is possible that internal verifiers are not observing assessment practice regularly and reviewing evidence at different points during the assessment process, or are not recording when these activities take place. ECITB identified this as an issue about 18 months ago and instructed its external verifiers to reinforce internal verification practices during visits to ensure that centres are implementing the *Internal verifier code of practice*. ECITB offers an online internal verifier course to give advice on best practice, and this includes information on activities such as internal verification sampling. In addition, biannual workshops are available to centres to assist them in standardising assessment practice. The operations manager stated that the geographic spread of assessment sites and prohibitive costs to centres where sites were situated offshore imposed limits on internal verification practices. ECITB is exploring the use of paperless portfolios to reduce the burden on internal verifiers and is piloting this approach with a number of centres. The system is designed to provide online access to recording interim and summative internal verification of candidates.

9. While some centres stated that the awarding body documentation did not include exemplar forms for internal verification there are examples in the *Internal verifier code of practice*. These included a *Sample planning form* and a *Sampling record and monitoring form*. Centres are also directed to the *NVQ code of practice* and the *Joint awarding body guidance on internal verification of NVQs*[2].

10. The assessment strategy for the craft NVQs uses external verification as the tool for guaranteeing external quality control. The aim is to externally verify the work of each assessor over all units and ensure that two mandatory units are 100 per cent externally verified at each visit, so that over time all mandatory units are covered as specified in the assessment strategy. External verifiers complete a detailed sampling plan recording the approved centre criteria checked and the

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[2] This guidance was produced by the Joint Awarding Body Steering Group of the DfES national project 'Additional Verification of NVQs in TEC funded programmes'.

mandatory units to be covered each year. The sampling plans scrutinised clearly identified how the external verifier would cover all assessment sites, assessors and candidates over time.

11. ECITB sends lists of candidates, assessors and internal verifiers registered by the centre to the external verifier at the point of candidate registration. When visits are due, external verifiers contact centres to make the arrangements and request up-dated lists of registered candidates, assessors and internal verifiers. The *External verifier visit plan* is then sent to centres prior to the visit and includes details of the candidates, assessors and internal verifier to be interviewed. All centres visited confirmed that the external verifier selected the candidates. External verifiers are responsible for informing the awarding body if the agreed date changes. Centres with registered candidates receive at least two visits each year.

12. The awarding body directs its external verifiers to the *NVQ code of practice* and the *Joint awarding body guidance on internal verification of NVQs* to select samples for external verification, and they are required to record the rationale behind the choice of work to be verified.

13. The operations manager confirmed that all centres have direct claims status after initial centre approval. While ECITB has suitable procedures for centre approval, the regulatory authorities consider that direct claims status should not be granted until after the initial cohort of candidates has been certificated.

14. ECITB showed the monitoring team the draft external verification report, which is being piloted and is linked to the approved centre criteria. External verifiers complete this with the VQ022, a candidate portfolio checklist, and the VQ023, which details onsite observation of assessment and verification practices. However, the external verifier reports scrutinised during centre visits confirmed that some were portfolio reviews only, and ECITB stated that these were designed to manage the volume of work at large centres. Other reports made minimal reference to the approved centre criteria and action points were often in the text of the report instead of being separately listed.

15. An external verifier stated that he uses the annual sampling plan to record how the approved centre criteria will be covered over time. Scrutiny of the plan confirmed the criterion and dates to be checked. All sampling plans are held by ECITB and monitored by the lead external verifier report to ensure coverage of

the approved centre criteria

16. External verifiers are given information on the implementation of the tariff of sanctions. There is space on the external verifier report form to record any sanctions recommended. Awarding body staff told the monitoring team that if an external verifier recommended a sanction, s/he would contact the operations manager who is also the lead verifier and he would make the final decision.

17. The operations manager checks every external verifier report received. There is a section for any comments if required. If any issues are identified about the completion of the form this is communicated via email, or at workshops where issues are generic across external verifiers. Centres are not sent the external verification report until it has been through this check and signed by the operations manager. In some instances the awarding body is not meeting its target response time that centres receive the report within 15 working days.

18. The operations manager is due to implement accompanied visits with each of the external verifiers to monitor their performance and aims to do this on an annual basis. There are no formal reports on observed external verifier performance as current reports are based on the annual review of contracts.

Accreditation conditions

3. ECITB must ensure that all centres have suitable documented internal verification policies and procedures that are implemented. (*NVQ code of practice*, paragraph 36.)

4. ECITB must implement the proposed monitoring of the performance of external verifiers supported by suitable documented records. (*NVQ code of practice*, paragraph 54.)

Observations

1. ECITB should ensure that centres are aware of their responsibility to inform the awarding body of staff changes, such as a change of internal verifier

2. ECITB should review its *Quality assurance procedures manual* to ensure that it reflects any changes imposed by the introduction of the new NVQ recording documentation.

3. ECITB should evaluate the pilot phase of paperless portfolios to ensure that internal verification activities meet the requirements of the awarding body and regulatory authorities.

4. ECITB should review its policy on awarding direct claims status at the centre approval stage so that it is confident in a centre's ability to meet the approved centre criteria prior to the issue of certificates.

5. ECITB should ensure that all external verifiers use the revised external verification report and list the action points on the VQ010.

Customer service

This is subject to *The statutory regulation of external qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (2004), paragraphs 32 and 33b.

Findings

1. ECITB carries out regular customer service satisfaction surveys and the results from the survey in 2004 confirmed that centres were satisfied with the service provided. The awarding body identified areas where improvement was needed such as improving the timescales for issuing certificates and communication with centres.

2. This supports the findings from centre visits that customers were satisfied overall with the level of customer service. One centre stated that there had been significant improvements in communication in the past 18 months and that the external verifier was excellent in providing support and guidance. One centre commented that the time delay in receiving the external verifier's report led to discrepancies in the updating of registered assessors. However, ECITB, as part of its quality assurance arrangements, requires centres to update them with any staff changes.

3. Centres commented that the *Quality assurance procedures manual* covered all the administrative requirements and provided guidance on policies such as appeals and malpractice. Three centres confirmed that they were aware of and had read the ECITB customer service statement but two centres had not.

Accreditation conditions

There are no conditions for this section.

Observations

6. ECITB should consider using its section on the website to display its customer service statement and use frequently asked questions and answers highlighting issues such as 'How long should records be maintained?', or signpost centres to the correct documentation.