



Qualifications and  
Curriculum Authority



Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru  
Welsh Assembly Government



# Post-accreditation monitoring report: WSET Awards

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# Introduction

## Regulating external qualifications

Responsibility for regulating external qualifications lies jointly with three regulators:

- the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA)
- the Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills, the body for Wales
- the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment, 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 action plan will be agreed with the regulators and its implementation monitored.

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 its awarding body recognition processes the regulators require awarding bodies to submit certain documents to QCA for the purposes of 'banking' it 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 the most crucial in supporting an awarding body's ability to operate effectively. In order 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 as part of the annual self-assessment return.

## **About this report**

This report is the outcome of a monitoring activity on the WSET Awards awarding body and was carried out by QCA on behalf of the regulators in July 2007. It draws together the regulator's findings on areas of corporate governance, resources and expertise, the quality assurance and control of independent assessment, the determination and reporting of results, registration and certification, customer service, reasonable adjustments, monitoring and evaluation, and enquiries and appeals.

This is the second post-accreditation monitoring activity on WSET Award's activities. An Awarding Body Recognition Update (ABRU) was completed in 2005 for which there are no outstanding accreditation conditions.

The monitoring activities included desk research of information already held by the regulators, the previous monitoring report, ABRU submission and scrutiny of WSET Award's website. The monitoring team visited WSET Award's head office to conduct interviews with staff and review documentation. An exam panel meeting was observed and four approved centres visited to check how the awarding body's quality assurance systems worked in practice.

## **About WSET Awards**

WSET Awards provides access to a range of vocationally related qualifications (VRQs) in wine and spirits. The qualifications at levels 1 and 2 are assessed through multiple-choice question (MCQ) papers. Level 3 includes an MCQ paper, a short-answer question (SAQ) paper and a practical wine-tasting examination paper. For more information on WSET Awards and the qualifications it offers visit the WSET website at [www.wset.co.uk](http://www.wset.co.uk).

## Corporate governance

This is subject to *The statutory regulation of external qualifications in England in Wales and Northern Ireland (2004)*, paragraphs 5, 6 and 7.

### Findings

1. WSET Awards is the only recognised awarding body for wine and spirits. It is a separate division of the parent organisation the Wine & Spirit Education Trust (WSET)<sup>1</sup>, which 'exists to promote, provide and develop high quality education and training in wines and spirits'. The Trust offers a range of services, which includes the WSET School, courses, and teaching and learning materials, and it manages the recommended tutor scheme. The awarding body receives a budget from the Trust, which is set by the senior management team and approved by the trustees.
2. The director of WSET Awards provided a documented overview of the organisation, including its structure and the lines of reporting between the awarding body, its committees and the Trust. The awarding body is accountable to the WSET Board of Trustees and reports to them through the WSET chief executive. The director of WSET Awards meets monthly with the chief executive to discuss awarding body issues. An exam panel meets monthly to look at the relevance and reliability of existing questions and to review new questions for submission to the databank. The Awards Supervisory Board (ASB) meets twice a year to monitor the work of WSET Awards and submits an annual report to the Board of Trustees. The ASB is independent of the awarding body, comprising of individuals from the wine trade and a chairperson from a different awarding body. This is good practice.
3. WSET Awards uses information technology (IT) systems to separate the work of the awarding body and the Trust. It has a separate database, which can only be accessed by awarding body staff. There is also a separate office with coded access for additional security.
4. The main issue for WSET Awards in its governance arrangements is the location of, and responsibility for, qualification development. It is located in a separate division of the Trust under the Programme Planning Department. Although the awarding body is consulted during the development stages, it does not have overall control of qualification development. Further discussion with the awarding body and the Trust has clarified the current situation. The wine and spirits sector does not have a standards setting body so

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<sup>1</sup>For the purpose of this report WSET, the parent organisation, will be referred to as the Trust.

the Trust develops the standards, specification and assessment strategy for these qualifications. Once the specifications are agreed WSET Awards devises the assessment tasks but the Trust submits the Part B to QCA for the qualifications to be accredited. The statutory regulations require awarding bodies to submit qualifications into the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) and the accountable officer is responsible for the quality and standards of these accredited qualifications. The regulators accept that the Trust is developing the standards and assessment methodology but the clear issue is the submission of Part B to QCA. The submission of qualifications to the NQF must be under the control of the accountable officer of the awarding body.

5. There is also an issue about branding and marketing. Referring to WSET® qualifications in the documentation with the registered company brand and using the acronym WSET for the awarding body is confusing and could be construed as a potential conflict of interest. The monitoring team recognises the significance of the Trust as the parent organisation but accredited qualifications must be the sole responsibility of the awarding body. To promote transparency in its governance arrangements WSET Awards needs to review all documentation for its accredited qualifications so that it is clear that responsibility and accountability for accredited qualifications are under the control of WSET Awards and not the Trust.
6. The Trust has a five-year business plan. The objectives for the awarding body form part of the accountable officer's objectives and are cascaded down to the awarding body as team and individual objectives. The chief executive of the Trust shares business information and concerns about the whole organisation at the quarterly staff forums.
7. The monitoring team were given full access to awarding body documentation, including staff appraisals, minutes and reports.

## Accreditation conditions

1. WSET Awards must review its governance arrangements with particular reference to the position of, and lines of accountability for, qualification development. The awarding body must show that it has sole responsibility for awarding qualifications and that any potential conflict of interest with other divisions within the Trust is suitably managed (*The statutory regulation of external qualifications in England in Wales and Northern Ireland (2004)*, paragraph 5d).

## Observations

1. WSET Awards should review and amend awarding body documentation so that it is clear that the awarding body is responsible for the accredited qualifications.

## Resources and expertise

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

### Findings

1. WSET Awards allocates head office staff to register, certificate, mark level 3 examination papers and take responsibility for quality assurance. The awarding body team also manages higher level qualifications outside of the NQF. The marking requirements for these qualifications may affect its ability to meet published timescales for issuing certificates for its accredited qualifications. Evidence from centre visits showed that while there has been an improvement in the time taken to issue certificates, published targets are not always met.
2. The awarding body has an appraisal system linked to agreed performance objectives. The monitoring team noted that the system evaluated how well individual objectives had been met. There was evidence of continuing professional development (CPD) to increase staff knowledge in the sector.
3. Contracted external examiners/markers<sup>2</sup> do not have formal appraisals and performance is monitored through the verification process. While there is a job specification for examiners there are no written procedures for recruiting or training these contractors or any requirement to maintain their CPD. Examiners must be involved in the wine trade and have relevant product knowledge above the level of the qualification being marked and this is tracked on the database. There are 22 examiners including six WSET Awards staff for the level 3 qualification and one verifier. These examiners also mark scripts for non-accredited qualifications.
4. Potential examiners have a one-to-one training session with the WSET Awards verifier and are given a maximum of 10 scripts to mark. These scripts are double marked by the verifier to ensure marking is consistent. There is no requirement for examiners to attend an annual training or up-date session. The monitoring team considers that examiners are not being given any opportunities for standardisation and sharing good practice as WSET Awards does not offer any collective training or up-date sessions.
5. WSET Awards uses internal assessors to mark the practical wine-tasting component. There are suitable procedures in place to nominate internal assessors. They have to meet the awarding body's requirements for expertise, training and qualifications.

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<sup>2</sup>For the purposes of this report examiners/markers will be referred to as examiners.



6. WSET Awards has a contingency plan for storing data. The information is backed up each day by the IT department for the Trust and stored off site.

### **Accreditation conditions**

2. WSET Awards must review the number of examiners allocated to its accredited qualifications so that timescales for issuing certificates are met.
3. WSET Awards must review and document its arrangements for recruiting and training examiners (*The statutory regulation of external qualifications in England in Wales and Northern Ireland (2004)*, paragraph 10).

### **Observations**

2. WSET Awards should consider offering an annual training or workshop to its examiners to promote standardisation and CPD, and share good practice.

## The 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, 56–58.

### Findings

1. All accredited qualifications offered by WSET Awards have an independent assessment component and are available on demand. The level of qualification determines the assessment method. For example levels 1 and 2 are examined using MCQ papers. Level 3 is a two-unit qualification. The first unit has an MCQ paper and an SAQ paper. The second unit is a practical wine-tasting examination, which is marked by an approved internal assessor and verified by WSET Awards.
2. The quality assurance arrangements for managing independent assessment are suitable. They include, for example, the retention of candidate work, managing conflicts of interest between examiners and centres, and the re-allocation of examiner work if assessment decisions are incorrect. It was noted that one examiner was re-trained because of errors in the marking of SAQs but as there was no improvement this examiner will not be used again.
3. There are suitable arrangements for setting and evaluating assessment tasks and ensuring that questions are free from bias. Members of the exam panel write questions and mark schemes for the examinations papers based on the relevant specification for each qualification. New questions and a sample of recent examination papers are reviewed at these meetings. The panel uses the statistics from the question analysis report of these examinations to check the reliability of items used from the question bank. Evidence from the minutes of these meetings show that minor adjustments are made to question papers, and new questions are accepted, rejected, withdrawn or re-written. These questions are then stored in a databank. A member of the monitoring team observed a meeting and was satisfied with the procedures followed.
4. WSET Awards uses standardised questions to promote reliable assessment for the MCQ papers. All papers are put through an optical machine reader (OMR), which is regularly calibrated. The machine matches the examination code to the questions in the database. Each question is matched to the correct answer and a mark issued. The monitoring team noted that some results for MCQ papers have been queried. At one centre two different papers were issued for the same examination date because of a late entry. The invigilator gave the papers to the wrong candidates, resulting in a fail and a merit because the

incorrect examination code was entered on the examination paper. The monitoring team is concerned that two different examination papers were offered at the same sitting.

5. The practical wine-tasting component for level 3 is taken under examination conditions with an invigilator. Internal assessors are sent a wine-purchasing key five days prior to the examination and choose one of the wines listed. This has to be a wine that has not been used within three months or three examinations. A marking key is produced using the template provided by the awarding body detailing the marks to be awarded for each section. Internal assessors prepare the wine samples and write the key two hours before the examination. After the examination the internal assessor marks the practical paper and records the marks. The tasting papers, purchasing and marking key, MCQ and SAQ papers are sent to WSET Awards for marking and verification. The awarding body is very clear that internal assessors cannot discuss the results with candidates, as the marks have not been confirmed.
6. Examiners mark the SAQ papers for level 3 and verify either 20 per cent or five papers for the practical tasting component. Twenty per cent of SAQ papers and borderline grades are verified in-house. While the verifier looks at the practical tasting component it is only sampled if examiners have identified any issues.
7. WSET Awards has procedures in place to monitor the work of examiners and internal assessors. Examiners not marking consistently receive feedback and guidance in a letter. If examiners receive a third letter they have to be retrained before they are allocated any further papers. Internal assessors also receive written feedback if there are any issues with the marking of the practical tasting paper. The monitoring team looked at examples of letters sent to examiners and internal assessors, but the procedures for monitoring examiners and internal assessors are not documented.
8. Clear instructions for the security of examination papers are explained in the Approved Programme Provider (APP) handbook. This includes information on the invigilation requirements and security of papers before and post-examination. The awarding body also states that spot checks on examinations may be done to ensure that its requirements are being met.
9. All specifications are written in English and WSET Awards has not had any requests for Welsh or Gaelic. The awarding body stated that it is prepared to translate materials if there is sufficient demand.

## **Accreditation conditions**

4. WSET Awards must have written procedures explaining how examiners and internal assessors are monitored (*The statutory regulation of external qualifications in England in Wales and Northern Ireland (2004)*, paragraph 36).

## **Observations**

3. WSET Awards should review its procedures for issuing examination papers so that only one paper is allocated to a centre at each sitting.

## 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. WSET Awards has pre-determined pass marks for all accredited qualifications and grade boundaries for levels 2 and 3. The pass mark for level 1 is 70 per cent and is classified as a pass or fail only. Level 2 is a single unit paper with a pass mark of 55 per cent. Level 3 consists of three components across two units. The marks are aggregated across all examination components and candidates must achieve a minimum of 55 per cent in each to pass. Clear information on pass marks and grades is included in the relevant specification for each qualification. Guidance on the number of questions allocated to each element of the unit and sample questions with answers are also included.
2. The monitoring team looked at a sample SAQ and noted that not all questions showed the number of available marks allocated to the question. In addition the MCQ paper does not state that candidates need to answer a minimum of 27 questions correctly to pass.
3. There are no formal awarding meetings. Levels 1 and 2 results are issued after papers are marked through the OMR but if any of the information is incorrect, such as the candidate name, the machine will not process the results until the mistake is rectified.
4. The awarding body uses a test item bank, AdValorem, to store examination questions for each level. AdValorem generates MCQ papers with a unique code. The candidate responses are scanned from the OMR form and entered into a table, which links to the Awards Results Database. This database combines the marks from all three components for level 3 and issues the results. The programme automatically flags up any fails and checks the grade boundaries. Marks for each component are confirmed through the initial verification process and adjusted if necessary. Candidates can request feedback on their examination papers identifying strengths and weaknesses.
5. WSET Awards has systems in place to adjust marks if errors are identified or assessments are not accurate and consistent. Marks can be adjusted at the verification stage or as the result of an enquiry after results have been issued. One enquiry found that an MCQ paper was creased when it went through the OMR and this affected the correct matching of questions to answers in the database. The paper was re-checked and the results amended.

### Accreditation conditions

There are no accreditation conditions for this section.

## Observations

4. WSET Awards should review and amend the rubrics to question papers for all examinations so that the marks allocated to each question are stated. In addition the awarding body should state the number of questions to be answered correctly to achieve a pass on all MCQ papers.

## Registration

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

## Findings

1. WSET Awards has suitable arrangements for approving its centres. All centres complete an application form and are visited before approval is confirmed. Centres with satellite sites complete an additional form confirming that these sites will follow the same systems and procedures.
2. The awarding body requires its approved centres to provide a named contact. It is not clear if this person is aware that they are the single named point of accountability for the qualifications. Evidence from centre visits confirmed that the main contact is the single named point of accountability.
3. When candidates are registered the database generates a lifetime unique candidate number, which is pre-fixed by the academic year.
4. WSET Awards collects data about its candidates, including ethnic origin and any reasonable adjustments required. This information is collated, fed into the ASB and forms part of the annual self-assessment report.

## Accreditation conditions

There are no accreditation conditions for this section.

## Observations

5. WSET Awards should amend its centre approval form so that the main contact person is named as the single point of accountability for the quality assurance and control of its accredited qualifications.

## Equality of opportunity, reasonable adjustments and special considerations

This is subject to *The statutory regulation of external qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (2004)*, paragraphs 9 and 14–20.

### Findings

1. Awarding bodies are required to consider the needs of all potential candidates when developing qualifications to minimise the need to make reasonable adjustments at a later date. Qualification development is managed by the Trust with input from the awarding body. Any changes to specifications are agreed with the senior management team of the Trust before implementation. The awarding body develops assessment tasks and takes account of current legislation throughout this process, ensuring equality of opportunity for all candidates.
2. WSET Awards submitted its policies for reasonable adjustments and special consideration as part of the ABRU process and there have been no significant changes. However, the awarding body does not mention aegrotat awards in its policy for special consideration. Discussion with WSET Awards staff confirmed that aegrotat awards are not offered and that the full requirements of the qualifications have to be met.

### Accreditation conditions

5. WSET Awards must specify in its policy for special consideration that it does not offer aegrotat awards and that all assessment requirements of the qualifications have to be met (*The statutory regulation of external qualifications in England in Wales and Northern Ireland (2004)*, paragraph 10).

### Observations

There are no observations for this section.



## Customer service statement

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

### Findings

1. WSET Awards has published its customer service statement, which meets the regulatory criteria. The statement is in the APP handbook or can be downloaded from the website.
2. Evidence from centre visits shows that the centres are satisfied with the level of service provided. Centres said certificate turnaround times had improved in recent years and that the awarding body was very supportive.
3. The awarding body has suitable arrangements to monitor its performance against its customer service targets. Target achievement is discussed at monthly team meetings. Statistics are used to check, for example, if certificates are issued within the published timescales. The results are passed onto the ASB and contribute to the self-assessment report.
4. WSET Awards publishes regular e-mail up-dates to all centres so that they are aware of any changes to the delivery of, or arrangements for, its accredited qualifications. This is good practice.

### Accreditation conditions

There are no accreditation conditions for this section.

### Observations

There are no observations for this section.

## **Certification and malpractice**

This is subject to *The statutory regulation of external qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (2004)*, paragraphs 21, 22 and 28–31.

### **Findings**

1. There have been no changes to the design of certificates or arrangements for requesting certificates since the ABRU was agreed in 2005.
2. The arrangements for reporting malpractice are clearly explained in the APP handbook and meet the regulatory criteria. Minor malpractice issues, such as collusion between candidates, have been identified but there have been no significant issues that could affect the validity of certificates. Instances of minor malpractice are recorded against the centre concerned and the director is issued with monthly incident reports.

### **Accreditation conditions**

There are no accreditation conditions for this section.

### **Observations**

There are no observations for this section.

## Enquiries and appeals

This is subject to *The statutory regulation of external qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (2004)*, paragraphs 23–27.

### Findings

1. WSET Awards has published its procedures for enquiries about results and appeals. Candidates are given the information in the qualification specification or they can ask the centre. The awarding body does receive enquiries about results but to date none have progressed to the appeal stage.
2. The arrangements for appeals explain the stages to be followed but these need to be reviewed as the awarding body is not meeting the regulatory criteria in full.
3. WSET Awards will appoint an appeals panel to review the appeal, which includes an individual from the Trust. However, this person is an employee of the Trust and currently has responsibility for qualification development. They are therefore not wholly independent from the awarding body. When deciding the outcome of the appeal awarding bodies must use an independent person who has not been involved with the awarding body in the last seven years.
4. Candidates dissatisfied with the decision of the appeals panel can have their appeal reviewed by the ASB, which is chaired by a person from another awarding body. As a member of the ASB they cannot be used as the independent person. This stage is not a requirement of the regulatory criteria.
5. If an appeal is unresolved after this stage it can be referred to the WSET Board of Trustees for review. This is not a requirement of the regulatory criteria, as independent review requires the processes followed by the awarding body to be reviewed and recommendations referred back to the group responsible for the initial appeal findings to make a final decision.
6. The appeals arrangements allow for the adjustment of marks if the outcome of an appeal finds inconsistencies in marking. All examination scripts from the cohort would be re-marked and results adjusted accordingly.

### Accreditation conditions

6. WSET Awards must review and amend its appeals policy so that it meets the regulatory criteria. The revised procedures must include an independent member on the Appeals panel and explain how an unresolved appeal will be independently reviewed (*The statutory regulation of external qualifications in England in Wales and Northern Ireland (2004)*, paragraph 25a and 25e).

## **Observations**

There are no observations for this section.

## Monitoring and evaluation

This is subject to *The statutory regulation of external qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (2004)*, paragraphs 33a, 34, 35 and 37.

### Findings

1. WSET Awards continually measures its progress against key objectives using monthly staff meetings. This review is in addition to the awarding body's annual monitoring and evaluation activities.
2. The awarding body uses the key descriptors from the regulatory criteria to evaluate its performance and sends a report to the ASB for consideration. Minutes from the ASB meetings show that the panel has considered the findings from self-assessment activities. The final report and action plan is submitted to the Board of Trustees. The monitoring team noted that implementing verification was a recurring issue in the reports.
3. Centres have the opportunity to feedback to WSET Awards through the annual renewal process. While there are no formal routes for candidates to provide feedback this is being addressed. A candidate examination questionnaire is being piloted with a centre.
4. WSET Awards has suitable arrangements to monitor the work of centres. Centres are visited every three years. Each centre receives a report on its pass rates linked to the national average across all centres. If they are not performing well the awarding body can look at different aspects of the examinations to see where the issues are. Centres are then contacted and asked to explain the results. The response is logged on the database and the awarding body can run reports on all centres, identifying specific issues. The monitoring team looked at a sample of these reports, which clearly identified problem areas. Centres with a succession of bad results are visited to ensure the correct syllabus is being used.

### Accreditation conditions

There are no accreditation conditions for this section.

### Observations

There are no observations for this section.