



Report on the monitoring of Highfield Qualifications

MAY 2019

Highfield Qualifications

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Report on the monitoring of Highfield Qualifications

About this report

CCEA Regulation is currently monitoring Highfield Qualifications (HQ). This has included a series of investigative interviews at HQ's premises on 4–5 March 2019. The focus of this monitoring activity was compliance with selected CCEA General Conditions of Recognition, detailed in this report.

CCEA Regulation acts on behalf of the Department of Education (DE) and the Department for the Economy (DfE) to regulate the qualifications offered to learners in Northern Ireland (NI). These functions are enabled by the Education (NI) Order 1998. The scope of CCEA Regulation was extended to cover all qualifications in Northern Ireland from May 2016.

CCEA Regulation undertakes a range of assurance activities to ascertain compliance, or otherwise, with CCEA General Conditions of Recognition (GCoR). These activities are proportionate to the level of risk perceived to be associated with any awarding organisation, with an individual qualification or a group of qualifications.

This report is the outcome of a monitoring activity for Highfield Qualifications (HQ) that was carried out between January and March 2018. The report draws together findings on the following CCEA General Conditions of Recognition:

GCoR Section C	Third Parties
GCoR Section G	Setting and Delivering the Assessment
GCoR Section H	From Marking to Issuing Results
GCoR Section I	Appeal and Certificates

Monitoring activities included desk research of information already held by CCEA Regulation, examination of HQ documentation and scrutiny of the awarding organisation's website. CCEA Regulation's monitoring team visited the HQ office to conduct interviews with staff and review documentation. Visits were also made to three centres offering a range of HQ qualifications. This report draws together findings from all of these activities.

Instances of non-compliance and observations arising from this monitoring activity are specified at the end of each section of this report. Awarding organisations are required to produce an action plan with timelines to show how they will deal with any non-compliances identified. The resulting action plan will be agreed and monitored by CCEA Regulation.

About Highfield Qualifications

Highfield Qualifications (HQ) is a family run awarding organisation, launched in 1982 with offices based in Doncaster. HQ provides qualifications globally and has a significant market presence in Northern Ireland, primarily in the sector areas of First Aid, Health and Safety and Food Hygiene. HQ was the eleventh largest AO in Northern Ireland in 2016 and the fifth largest in 2018.

HQ has 216 qualifications on the register of regulated qualifications at levels 1–4. Of these, 149 of these are offered in Northern Ireland. In 2018, HQ awarded 8495 certificates in Northern Ireland, making it the fifth largest AO by award of certificates. Certificates are mostly in the vocational areas of Food Safety, First Aid and Security.

C

Findings GCoR Section C: Third Parties

Condition C1 Arrangements with Third Parties

- The AO has arrangements with centres across the UK that deliver and assess its qualifications. For the purpose of this audit, these centres are third parties. At the time of the monitoring audit, HQ had 54 live centres in Northern Ireland. HQ confirmed that inactive centres are removed. The centres that HQ works with are mainly training organisations.
- A centre can apply to HQ to become a recognised centre through an online application process on their website. The terms and conditions that apply to this legal agreement are set out very clearly in the application process, with the centre representative being asked to tick agreement to the most significant conditions in individual boxes. The relationship, and terms and conditions are also contained in the HQ Core Manual which is made available to all registered centres.
- HQ's policy in relation to centre application is risk based. For all applications, background checks are carried out on centres and persons associated with the centre, including social media checks. All First Aid AOs are required to share information about centres, where risk is identified. The system has warning generators whereby the application is diverted to the compliance team, which makes stringent checks. Where there are any issues, the centre is rejected. About 20 percent of applications are rejected.
- All documents and communications from centres are banked. Tutors are regulated and tracked throughout – new tutors must be registered with HQ. Five days' notice is required for a centre to post courses. The system will not allow a tutor with an expired qualification to be selected.
- The centre number is issued at the end of the application process.
- The application process is designed to provide assurances that the centre can develop, deliver and award qualifications in accordance with the GCoR.
- Centres are risk rated on a High/Medium/Low scale. This is reviewed over time, and as centres register learners and claim qualifications. Ongoing monitoring of centres includes unannounced audits and visits, and learner interviews.
- The AO provided all documents and the email conversation thread in relation to the application process for a recently approved Northern Ireland centre.
- The details in relation to C1.1 provided in the Statement of Compliance and the specifications suggest that the steps taken by HQ support the work of the third party.
- HQ provided evidence to show that centres evaluate their customer service as good.

C2.1 and C2.2, C2.3 Arrangements with Centres

- A written and enforceable agreement between HQ and a centre comes into being when the centre application is successful. The centre representative is able to view this document and download it as a PDF. An HQ account manager is assigned to a centre as soon as its application is successful.
- HQ uses a rigorous checking of centre policies and provides guidance for this. Details of all staff and tutors are recorded and monitored. HQ banks all of this information.
- HQ sends regular email updates to centres when criteria changes – the system allows HQ to monitor and record whether emails have been opened.
- HQ has submitted timely replies to a CCEA Regulation SoC request for the previous three years.
- HQ requests information and documents routinely from its centres.
- HQ makes centres aware of the role of the regulators during the application process and that they may be asked to participate in regulation activities.
- Communications are in place to ensure that centres comply with the HQ centre requirements.
- Sanctions are detailed in the centre agreement.
- Centres are required to confirm they have:
 - an appropriate workforce when the centre agreement is signed, and such resources are checked through quality monitoring procedures;
 - appropriate resources when the centre agreement is signed, and such resources are checked through quality monitoring procedures;
 - an Equality and Diversity policy; and
 - uploaded the Complaints and Appeals procedures during the application process.
- HQ's computer system stores all the data relating to centres and qualifications, and allows management to monitor all aspects of centres, associated tutors, qualifications and assessments.

D

E

Findings GCoR Section D: General Requirements for regulated qualifications and Section E: Design and development of qualifications

D1.1 and D1.2 Fitness for purpose of qualifications and E3.1, E3.2 and E3.3 Design and development of qualifications

- At the time of the audit, HQ had 61 qualifications on the register that were regulated by CCEA Regulation.
- HQ is market led: a Qualification Development Instruction is based on what the business development team identifies. This mostly comes from centres suggesting what they need. This was evident in the business plan.
- HQ has a New Ideas Forum on its website to encourage qualification suggestions from interested parties.
- HQ maintains a full-time team of 17 subject experts. It also has a large team of consultants with appropriate experience and qualifications, who are involved in qualification design. This expertise is used to ensure qualifications are developed appropriately.
- HQ's development team has achieved ISO 9001 standard, confirming their ability to provide products and services that consistently meet customer and regulatory requirements.
- Centres that deliver internally assessed qualifications are subject to engagements by HQ's sector competent External Quality Support (EQS) personnel. These engagements are either to confirm certification (Non-Direct Claims Status) or to review portfolios of learners already certificated, for example those centres that have demonstrated high standards of internal quality assurance. These engagements focus on:
 - a. sampling learners' work;
 - b. confirmation that standards have been met;
 - c. review of assessment and quality assurance activities and arrangements; and
 - d. review of teaching, assessing and quality assurance of staff competency.
- Minutes of meetings record the viability of proposed qualifications.
- With new qualifications, a user group is formed to receive feedback during the process.
- If a qualification is to be internally assessed, guidance materials are developed for the training of centre assessors, and moderation will be put in place. If external assessment is required, HQ will train and/or recruit appropriate staff.
- Some qualifications have cycles and changes or updates to specifications. Sometimes similar qualifications may be identified and brought together. Qualification review is continuous, through feedback and forums. New tests are reviewed within hours. Changes may be needed because of legislative changes.

Report on the monitoring of Highfield Qualifications

- Process for qualifications development include:
 - a. E-Working instructions for the development of qualifications,
 - b. Qualification development process
 - c. Qualification Review Cycle Diagram
 - d. Qualification Review Cycle instructions
 - e. Validity Log Template
- Specifications have similar formats and meet specified criteria.
- HQ's team of subject experts and consultants work on qualification development.
- Specifications have been successfully accredited by CCEA Regulation.



G

Findings GCoR Section G: Setting and delivering the Assessment

G1 Setting the assessment

HQ's has an experienced team who work on assessment design. Each qualification has an associated Internal Quality Assurance Support Pack (TAI Pack), which provides guidance on delivery, assessment and internal quality assurance for centres and centre staff.

G4 Maintaining confidentiality of assessment materials, including the conduct of specified training events

- HQ publishes details of training events on its website. There is an annual general training event held in Northern Ireland.
- HQ has strict procedures in relation to the confidentiality of assessment materials – access and storage is strictly controlled. Electronic storage uses restricted access to question banks, including those under development.
- HQ has invigilation and examination procedures. Papers are sealed in a plastic envelope, which is opened only by the learner.
- All physical papers are kept in a locked cabinet with keys held by a small number of senior managers.
- In a centre, only a Registered Centre Contact can order exam papers.

G8 Completion of the assessment under the required conditions

- HQ's EQS team monitor internal assessment.
- Learner portfolios are assessed internally and moderated externally. Initially a centre will go through the QS process and then later apply for Direct Claim Status.
- Some qualifications with a theory component are assessed by multiple-choice test.
- Assessments are generally reviewed on a paper to paper basis. The online testing systems are regularly reviewed and revised, where necessary.

G9 Delivering the assessment

- HQ has procedures and computer systems that ensure that assessments are delivered effectively and efficiently.

H

Findings GCoR Section H: From Marking to Issuing Results

H2 Moderation where an assessment is marked by a centre

- Centres may be awarded Direct Claim Status (DCS) based on the centre's history of performance. Sampling can be carried out at any time.
- Before DCS is awarded, 100 percent sampling is carried out.
- If any issues are detected for centres with DCS, it will be removed.

H3.1 Monitoring the specified levels of attainment for a qualification

- HQ maintains a full-time team of subject experts and consultants who are involved in qualification design. This experience is used to ensure qualifications have the correct level of attainment attributed to them.

