



**Report on the monitoring of the
Award Scheme Development and
Accreditation Network (ASDAN)**

MAY 2018

Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN)

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About 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 2017 (GCoR). These activities are proportionate to the level of risk perceived to be associated with any awarding organisation, an individual qualification or a group of qualifications.

This report is the outcome of a monitoring activity on ASDAN 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	Appeals and Certificates

Monitoring activities included desk research of information already held by CCEA Regulation, examination of ASDAN documentation and scrutiny of the awarding organisation's website. The CCEA Regulation's monitoring team visited

the ASDAN office to conduct interviews with staff and review documentation. Visits were also made to four centre offering a range of ASDAN qualifications. This report draws together the regulator's 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 ASDAN

ASDAN is an education charity and awarding organisation. Developed and managed by practitioners, ASDAN grew out of research work at the University of the West of England in the 1980s and was formally established as an educational charity in 1991. ASDAN was recognised by Ofqual in April 2010 and currently has 36 qualifications available to learners in Northern Ireland.

C

Findings GCoR Section C: Third Parties

Condition C1 Arrangements with Third Parties

- ASDAN has a number of partnerships listed on its website. These include the Lord Mayor's Show, WE Day, Fair Education Alliance and Geographical Association. Staff confirmed that these relationships do not impact on the qualifications. Some are endorsement of programmes and some are ASDAN strategic partners.
- Following its declaration of non-compliance in its annual Statement of Compliance 2017, ASDAN created an action plan for improvement relating to its centre risk management procedures including centre approval and monitoring. The measures taken and improved centre controls appear to be robust in allowing ASDAN to be confident in its third party arrangements and in meeting its Conditions of Recognition.
- ASDAN centres are required to declare if they have any additional third party or satellite arrangements. Whilst some centres do have such arrangements, staff stated there are none in its centres in Northern Ireland. This was confirmed at the four centres visited where none had any third party arrangements.
- Centres are reminded of their responsibilities in regard to any third party or satellite arrangements in the ASDAN Centre Guidance (generic) which states that 'the responsibility for ensuring the quality of delivery lies

with the sub-contracting centre'. This is further reinforced in section 11 of the ASDAN Centre Agreement.

Condition C2 Arrangements with Centres

- ASDAN qualifications are internally assessed and moderated at centres before being subject to external moderation. There are currently 52 ASDAN centres in Northern Ireland.
- Centres apply to become an ASDAN centre through an online process. Centres are asked a number of questions and are required to upload their policies and procedures and proposed staffing arrangements to a secure member area of the ASDAN website. The Centre Support Team reviews the centre documents using a Key Points Document for reference.
- Potential centres are also required to submit their assessment plans for scrutiny, by the regional manager, as well as attend a mandatory training event prior to approval. Given that the nature of ASDAN qualifications is internal assessment, this is a welcome addition to its centre approval criteria.
- ASDAN staff use a Centre and Qualification Approval process which is a new risk based approach to centre approval. This process determines whether it is appropriate for the centre to receive a site visit or Skype interview. For example, having no previous centre history or planning to register large numbers of learners.
- Once centre approval is confirmed centres may register learners to access external moderation.

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- ASDAN provides ongoing support to centres with the allocation of a named regional manager who will maintain direct contact to offer support and guidance. In addition to the mandatory training, ASDAN offers a number of free training events throughout the year which can be themed or bespoke to the centre if required. For example, evidence seen of recent themed events showed one focusing on assessment plans and another on internal moderation. Centre staff attendance at training events is monitored and centres must attend at least one event every three years. ASDAN head office staff also provide support including the centre support team, Live Chat and Facetime.
- ASDAN provided a list of centre support and training events that have taken place in Northern Ireland during 2016/7. They included training workshops, bespoke training, standardisation meetings, support meetings, a themed event on internal moderation and a themed event on assessment.
- All four centres visited were aware of the training events. They were particularly appreciative of the standardisation meetings that had been held locally and where 'live' learner portfolios were reviewed from the point of view of external moderation. The sharing and group working was seen to be very beneficial.
- ASDAN centres sign an annual Centre Agreement that clearly outlines their responsibilities in regard to CCEA and its Conditions of Recognition. This document contains all the requirements of C2.3. Training events and workshops also serve to remind centres of their responsibilities and the consequences of any breaches to that agreement.
- Under ASDAN's new arrangements, centres are required review and update their policies and procedures annually, so that they remain current. Centres are also required to update their staffing, including centre contact and assessment staff as and when team changes occur. The annual Centre Agreement is also linked to having the required and up-to-date centre information.
- All centres visited in Northern Ireland were aware of these new arrangements.
- Currently three centres in Northern Ireland have not updated the system with their policies and procedures. These centres will not be allowed any external moderation activity until their documents are up to date.
- Centre monitoring is carried out using a risk based audit programme, which has been enhanced as part of ASDAN's improvements. Auditors review the systems and processes in place at the centre rather than assessments.
- The audit process starts with a risk review that is carried out at the end of the academic year. Issues that have arisen throughout the year, including those from moderation, are identified and evaluated to consider any theme or trend that could inform the need for a specific training event. ASDAN staff use set risk selection criteria and follow the detailed Centre Auditing Policy and Procedures to identify the centres

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that require an audit visit. This was 6 % of the total number of centres during 2017 and will rise to 8 % for 2018.

All centres will receive a visit at least every three years either through the audit process or through the external moderation process.

- ASDAN stated that three centres in Northern Ireland had been identified for audit visits during 2018.
- Auditors use the Centre Auditing Procedure for Auditors document which ensures all centres are subject to the same process. Audit visits take place over a set period of time such as February to April.
- Centres are risk rated following the visit and some may have an action plan for improvement, which is monitored monthly. Centre approval and audit information is also provided monthly to the SLT and quarterly to the trustees. Any centres that are rated as RED or cause for concern are effectively frozen and will not be able to access external moderation for its learners.

Condition C1 Arrangements with publishers

- ASDAN staff confirmed that it does not use any endorsed publications in connection with its regulated qualifications.

Non-compliances

There are no instances of non-compliances in relation to this section.

Observations

There are no observations in relation to this section.

G

Findings GCoR Section G: Setting and delivering the assessment

Condition G1 Setting the assessment

- The internal assessment and external moderation method of assessments used in ASDAN qualifications are largely based on historical key skills models. Consultation with stakeholders contributes to the make-up of units and ensures that the assessment methods remain appropriate.
- Level of demand is assured with the use of set Standard Level Descriptors, learning outcomes and assessment criteria. Centres are provided with qualification specifications and guidance with standards for each qualification.
- ASDAN has not developed any new qualifications recently although it plans to do so in the future. However, ASDAN does have a detailed qualifications development process and a number of checklists which allows it to meet the requirements of the General Conditions of Recognition.
- Currently however, the use of the title of each qualification as it appears on the Register is not being used on ASDAN qualification specifications, which is a non-compliance of condition E2.3. This condition states that the full title must be used consistently on any communication and publication.
- ASDAN is considering a change in its assessment methods to include an element of external assessment for a

new qualification. It is the early stages of the qualification development process but ASDAN are already looking at consultation with users to determine which form of external assessment might be most appropriate and the additional resources it might need for implementation.

- ASDAN carries out an annual review of each existing qualification using statistics, and feedback from centres. Qualifications are also reviewed at their end date. The product champion and project manager jointly oversee qualifications review or development.
- Centre assessment plans are reviewed by regional managers or moderators using the Assessment Plan Checklist. They check for relevance and clarity of the assessment activity, how it meets the required assessment criteria, the level of demand, using standard level descriptors, language and accessibility.

Condition G2 Language of the assessment

ASDAN staff confirmed that although there is Irish medium used at some of the schools which are ASDAN centres there have been no requests for assessments in Irish, and all assessments are in English.

Condition G3 use of Language and Stimulus Materials

- ASDAN engages with a technical expert to check for the appropriateness of language and level of demand in its qualifications when they are developed. Checks are also made by external moderators or regional managers when checking centre

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assessment plans that proposed activities are clear and unambiguous and set at the appropriate level using the Assessment Plan Checklist.

- The use of stimulus materials is not appropriate for ASDAN qualifications.

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

- In its Statement of Compliance, ASDAN states that it does not have any qualifications with confidential assessment materials and that no external assessment is currently undertaken. This was confirmed by staff.
- Staff also confirmed that ASDAN does not use live assessment materials in any training events.

Condition G5 Registration of Learners

- ASDAN has a comprehensive process for the registration of learners. CCEA staff observed a demonstration of the system.
- ASDAN centres will block buy a number of learner registrations, based on the anticipated cohort numbers for a particular qualification. Centres may use some or all of its purchased registration at any one time and can keep any others for a period of three years.
- When a centre has learners ready for external moderation they will request external moderation. They must allow

for a minimum of 5 weeks' notice for any moderation activity.

- ASDAN staff allocate an appropriate external moderator and moderation date, and will also determine if the centre requires an external moderation visit or whether it can have postal moderation. A visit is based on the centre risk, for example if there is a large cohort.
- When the date of external moderation has been confirmed, the centre will register the learners who require it. Learner details may include any existing ASDAN learner number or ULN. The registration will include the unit details, assessor and internal moderator. Centres are not able to use any assessment staff not previously identified through the centre approval update process.
- ASDAN will then allocate a unique learner number to those who require it and learners are effectively registered.

Condition G6 Arrangements for Reasonable Adjustments

- Documents relating to Access Arrangements including Reasonable Adjustments are available on the ASDAN website.
- The documents include the policy and procedures, a permissions table and the forms that centres are required to complete and submit. The permissions table lists the type of adjustment that may be made and whether the centre is able to make those adjustments with or without first seeking permission to do so.

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- The nature of ASDAN qualifications means that the use of reasonable adjustments is rare. Using read-write software to adapt tests and tasks has further reduced the demand for internally assessed qualifications.
- ASDAN staff maintain a log of notified reasonable adjustments made, but there have been none for centres in Northern Ireland.

Condition G7 Arrangements for Special Consideration

- Documents relating to Access Arrangements including Special Consideration are on the ASDAN website.
- The CCEA Regulation team was shown a log of instances of Special Consideration that are also rare for internally assessed qualifications. The examples seen related to long-term illness, where a learner was unable to complete a qualification or attend an assessment, where a doctor's letter was provided as supporting evidence. The learner was given a unit certificate for the work already achieved.
- The example seen, although not recent, cannot be seen as special consideration, which is used if a learner has attempted to take an assessment but their performance at the time of assessment was compromised.
- There were no requests for special consideration for centres in Northern Ireland.

Condition G8 Completion of the assessment under the required conditions

- ASDAN provides an Assessment Checklist for each unit that lists the learning outcomes, assessment criteria and the location of the evidence. The checklist has space for the learner to sign to confirm authenticity for each unit. There is also space for the assessor and internal moderator signature.
- The Centre Guidance (generic) provides guidance for centres on authenticity.
- For assessments using group work, the authenticity of assessment is shown in the recording documentation, which draws out the individual responses to the activity.
- ASDAN staff stated that if issues such as plagiarism were found during external moderation, they would be dealt with using the malpractice and investigation procedures. Issues are most likely to be the result of poor assessment practice or poor internal moderation processes.
- ASDAN allows learners to undertake additional challenges once a unit has been successfully completed in the Personal and Social Development qualification only. The challenge is taken under controlled conditions and gives the candidate the opportunity to put acquired knowledge into practice. Guidance on how these should be set and supervised is provided to centres. Although set by ASDAN, these challenges are not mandatory and do not add anything to the regulated qualification.

Condition G9 Delivering the Assessment

- ASDAN monitors the consistency of assessment within and across all centres through its centre approval, moderation and audit processes. Regional managers or moderators review and confirm the appropriateness of assessment plans. Enhanced procedures implemented from September 2017 ensure that all new centres are now required to evidence their assessment plans prior to approval.
- ASDAN also provides a lot of free support for centres through its training and standardisation events and contact with staff. Centres must attend a training event at least once in a three-year period.
- Centres have approved assessment plans and use an assessment checklist for each unit assessed. They also provide standard level descriptors.
- Guidance for centres on internal moderation and the role of the internal moderator is provided in the Centre Guidance with Standards documents. Specific training on internal moderation is also available for centres. ASDAN provides guidance on internal moderation sampling. It suggests 100 % to start with, reducing to 10 % over time. The internal moderation sampling strategy should also cover all learners, assessors and units over time. The sampling plan is sent to ASDAN with the sample for external moderation.

- The qualification specifications state that 'ASDAN cannot be held responsible for any difficulties that arise in the delivery or assessment process as a result of internal recruitment decisions'. However, as ASDAN is responsible and accountable for ensuring that all assessments are fit for purpose, this statement may need to be reconsidered.

Non-compliances

Condition G1 Setting the Assessment

To be compliant, ASDAN must review and amend its qualification specifications and any other publication to ensure that any reference to a qualification is consistent in including the full title as it appears on the Register.

Observations

Condition G7 Arrangements for Special Consideration

ASDAN is advised to review and clarify the definition of special consideration in its documents. This would be important if ASDAN plans to include an element of external assessment in any future new qualifications.

Condition G9 Delivering the Assessment

ASDAN is requested to consider rewording the qualification specifications to make clear that although centres are responsible for their own recruitment ASDAN has ultimate accountability for the delivery and award of its qualifications.

H

Findings GCoR Section H: From Marking to Issuing Results

Condition H1 Marking the Assessment

ASDAN does not use marking processes as all its assessments are internally assessed and externally moderated. Therefore, this condition may not currently be applied to its qualifications. This was confirmed by ASDAN staff.

Condition H2 Moderation where an assessment is marked by a centre

- External moderation is carried out either by a visit to the centre or by post. ASDAN staff in head office selects the sample for external moderation from the list of learners provided. If the sample includes over 30 learners, if it is a new centre or if the centre has not been visited for three years, it will be allocated an external moderation visit. Further samples may be requested, if required.
- ASDAN uses couriers to transport candidate portfolios for external moderation by post.
- ASDAN has a team of 40 external moderators who are provided with an external moderator manual and guidance. A team of Principal Moderators manages the team of external moderators, one for each qualification. External moderators are required to attend annual standardisation events. They are subject to performance management

by Principal Moderators, who draw up an action plan of CPD activity for each one, such as attendance at ASDAN training events. This may also include joint visits where necessary. ASDAN staff monitor all written reports. Monitoring of reports leads to a specific report writing training event for moderators during 2017.

- Moderation samples include the learners work, centre internal moderation strategy and assessment plans. Feedback is provided to centres in the external moderation report. External moderation reports should be completed within five days of the moderation.
- If there is insufficient evidence to demonstrate achievement of the required standard, the evidence is returned to the centre with detailed feedback and justification for the decision. ASDAN staff keep a record of where assessments have been referred back to the centre. If the moderation decision and the assessment decision is in dispute, it will be considered through the enquiry and appeals process.
- All moderator issues found are recorded to inform the annual risk review of centres.

Condition H3 Monitoring the specified levels of attainment for a qualification

- At the start of its qualifications development process the appropriate level for the qualification is determined and made clear before the process continues.

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- ASDAN carries out an annual review of its qualifications. It looks at a sample of units from similar qualifications with other awarding organisations, for comparison as part of the review process.
- ASDAN also uses standard level descriptors for use by all those involved in the delivery of the qualification to ensure consistency.
- ASDAN staff review the moderation results and check the learner database to ensure the details are correct, as per the original registration information.
- The database is pre-programmed to calculate the results, which ensures that the correct number of units and credits, where gained, are sufficient to achieve the full qualification.
- Once these checks are made, the external moderator emails the centre with a summary of achievement.
- Centres are then issued with the certificates, results and full moderation feedback report within 20 working days from the external moderator decision.
- ASDAN is moving away from its Direct Claim system for certificates and currently only has three centres that are still allowed to use it. ASDAN staff confirmed that no results are issued unless moderation has taken place.

Condition H4 Adjudication by CCEA Regulation of specified levels of attainment for a qualification

By agreeing to adhere to the General Conditions of Recognition, awarding organisations also agree to abide by any action or direction given by a regulator such as those described in H4.1. ASDAN staff confirmed this.

Condition H5 Results for a qualification must be based on sufficient evidence

ASDAN qualifications are internally assessed and moderated and externally moderated. Therefore marking of the assessment is not appropriate to these qualifications. Appropriate levels of evidence and attainment are contained within the quality assurance processes for external moderation described in H2.

Condition H6 Issuing results

- When the external moderation process is finished, a CANB submission form is uploaded together with the external moderation report and sampling record.

Non-compliances

There are no instances of non-compliances in relation to this section.

Observations

There are no observations in relation to this section.

I

Findings GCoR Section I: Appeals and Certificates

Condition I1 Appeals process

- The ASDAN Policy and Procedures for Enquiries and Appeals is published on the website.
- ASDAN requires its centres to provide information to learners on enquiries and appeals. This may be done through learner handbooks or at induction. This is checked at centre audit visits.
- ASDAN staff stated that it had not received any formal appeals from centres in Northern Ireland.
- The nature of ASDAN qualifications lessens the demand for making an appeal and learners are advised that they must first exhaust the centre's own appeals process. However, ASDAN staff stated that they do receive some enquiries. These tend to be from assessors not understanding feedback or querying moderator decisions. All enquiries are logged.

Condition I2 Compliance with CCEA Regulation's appeals and complaints process

By agreeing to adhere to the General Conditions of Recognition, awarding organisations also agree to abide by any action or direction given by a regulator such as the application of an appeals or complaints process. ASDAN staff confirmed this.

Condition I3 The design and content of certificates

- ASDAN Programmes and Qualifications Costs document states 'All candidate registration costs shown below are per candidate, unless otherwise stated. The learner registration fee covers the administrative costs of registering the learner for the qualification, the student book, co-ordination of moderation and awarding/certification.'
- This extract is a good example of how ASDAN is inconsistent in its use of the word learner, candidate and student. This is potentially confusing, for example is candidate registration costs the same as the learner registration fee? Learner is the term more commonly used. ASDAN may wish to review its documents to make the terms more consistent.
- Additional fees are charged for any replacement certificates issues.
- ASDAN certificates are printed on demand, on-site. They are colour coded for each qualification and include a security mark. All certificates have a unique serial number as well as the learner's own registration number and centre number and date of issue.
- A sample of certificates was provided. Although all the certificates contained the required information, the title of the qualification as it appears on the Register was quite small and not easy to see on some certificates. The condition I3.2b requires this information to be displayed clearly. ASDAN may wish to consider the design of its certificates to make the title more prominent.

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- The application of the CCEA logo was correct.
- Replacement certificates are the same design as other certificates, but include the word REPLACEMENT and will have a different serial number.

Non-compliances

There are no instances of non-compliances in relation to this section.

Observations

Condition I3 The design and content of certificates

ASDAN may wish to consider reviewing the design of its certificates to make the full title of the qualification more prominent.

ASDAN may wish to consider reviewing all of its documents to ensure a consistent reference to learner is made and avoid the potential for confusion.



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