



External Quality Assurance policy

Policy overview

YMCA Awards is committed to the provision and maintenance of an effective system of external quality assurance for the purpose of approving and monitoring centres in their delivery of YMCA Awards qualifications and components (units), in line with the requirements set out by the regulator of qualifications in England (Ofqual), the regulator of qualifications in Wales (Qualification Wales) and the regulator of qualifications in Northern Ireland (CCEA Regulation).

In accordance with the Conditions of Recognition set out by Ofqual, Qualification Wales and CCEA Regulation, YMCA Awards implements an external quality assurance policy that enables us to monitor the activities of our approved centres in the delivery of YMCA Awards qualifications and to enforce the terms of the Centre Agreement made between YMCA Awards and our approved centres (signed by each centre prior to delivery of qualifications and updated periodically as required). In setting and maintaining an appropriate external quality assurance policy, YMCA Awards takes all reasonable steps to ensure that we do not impose unnecessary or unduly burdensome requirements on our approved centres.

This document sets out the framework and stages in YMCA Awards' external quality assurance policy. The policy focuses on the monitoring of centres, including centre controls and reference to sanctions, and should be read in conjunction with our guidance on the role of the centre internal quality assurer (IQA), available on the YMCA Awards [website](#).

Recognition as a YMCA Awards centre

YMCA Awards has policy and procedure for centre approval in place to ensure that each centre has appropriate:

- policies and procedures that support the delivery and assessment of YMCA Awards qualifications
- resources and systems necessary to deliver and assess YMCA Awards qualifications, meeting the requirements set out in the qualification specifications(s) and any other related policies and procedures
- venues and resources for assessment purposes that provide access to all learners (in line with the requirements of YMCA Awards Reasonable Adjustments and Special Consideration Policy) and do not unfairly disadvantage any individual or groups of learners
- staff who have the necessary knowledge, understanding and skills required to deliver, assess and quality assure YMCA Awards qualifications.

Centres apply for approval to deliver YMCA Awards qualifications by making an initial request to apply via the YMCA Awards [website](#), which proceeds to application via YMCA Awards' online portal Y-Connect. Support to complete the application form is available to centres through one-to-one training and a [pre-recorded demonstration](#), walking applicants through the online form.

The application is subject to an initial desk-based review, which may include communication to the centre by the YMCA Awards Quality team to request further information or evidence to support the application.

During the desk-based review, a judgement is made on whether a pre-approval external quality assurance visit or remote meeting should take place. This visit or meeting will be carried out by a member of YMCA Awards' external quality assurance team. The visit/meeting outcomes are used to inform a decision on the centre's approval application; this may include actions for the centre

to complete before a final approval decision can be made. Completion of actions by a centre does not guarantee approval; there may also be circumstances in which actions can be completed after approval is granted, if appropriate.

The Centre Agreement

Prior to receiving approval to deliver YMCA Awards qualifications, each centre must sign the Centre Agreement between YMCA Awards and the centre and must thereby undertake to deliver YMCA Awards qualifications in accordance with this Agreement.

The terms of the Centre Agreement/Terms and Conditions form a key part of YMCA Awards' External Quality Assurance Policy. In particular, the Centre Agreement makes provision that requires the centre to:

- retain a workforce of appropriate size and competence to undertake the delivery of the qualification as required by YMCA Awards
- take all reasonable steps to comply with requests for information or documents made by YMCA Awards or each of the regulators of qualifications as soon as practicable
- assist YMCA Awards in carrying out any reasonable monitoring activities and to assist in any investigations relating to malpractice and maladministration
- adhere to YMCA Awards' published Sanctions Policy in the event that the centre fails to comply with appropriate and relevant requirements
- have available sufficient managerial and other resources to enable it effectively and efficiently to undertake the delivery of the qualification as required by YMCA Awards
- undertake the delivery of the qualification required by YMCA Awards in accordance with Equalities Law
- operate a centre complaints handling procedure or appeals process for the benefit of learners
- take all reasonable steps to protect the interests of learners if the centre decides to cease the delivery of one or more YMCA Awards qualifications.

Centres are required to evidence their capacity and competency to meet the requirements of the Centre Agreement and Terms and Conditions during centre approval application and review and through ongoing external quality assurance activity and monitoring. For example, a typical external quality assurance visit will include a check against the requirements above, with the centre's responses recorded in the visit report.

A risk-based approach

All centres have a risk rating of low, medium or high. These ratings represent the level of risk to learners, to standards and to the overall validity of YMCA Awards qualifications being delivered and assessed by a centre. A high level of adherence to YMCA Awards requirements, as set out in the qualification specification(s) and other related policies and procedures, measured through the evidence supplied by the centre, will in most instances result in a low risk rating. Where a centre has a generally good level of adherence to YMCA Awards requirements, but has gaps that have been identified with an appropriate risk control already in place, a medium risk rating is likely to be applied.

Circumstances in which a high-risk status is assigned to a centre may typically occur when a sanction is in place; detailed information on this is published in the YMCA Awards Sanctions

Policy. In some situations, a high-risk status may be assigned for reasons beyond the centre's control such as geographical location or learner needs; in these cases, the risk rating enables us to manage the risks through additional support and intervention within the external quality assurance framework.

The first point at which a risk rating is issued is a provisional rating assigned to a centre during the review of a centre's approval application; this is for YMCA Awards internal use only.

Once a centre is approved, a risk rating of low, medium or high is assigned to the centre by the YMCA Awards Quality team. This rating is established from a range of information, including the content of the centre's application, any actions set by the external quality assurer, specific challenges the centre may experience and the type of qualifications intended for delivery.

A centre's risk rating is kept under review throughout their approval as a YMCA Awards centre. This review is managed by the YMCA Awards Quality team; judgement on the appropriate risk rating is a holistic decision that takes into account the outcome of ongoing external quality assurance activity as well as information sourced from both internal stakeholders (such as YMCA Awards Customer Support staff) and external stakeholders (such as learners and other awarding organisations).

The process of risk rating centres enables YMCA Awards to take a proportionate approach to centre monitoring and controls. Centres that have been assigned a medium or high risk status can expect to be subject to closer monitoring by YMCA Awards, which may be aligned to increased sampling and/or visits (including unannounced assessment observations) over and above the minimum standard outlined below. High and medium risk centres will also be given appropriate additional support and training to enable them, where possible, to achieve an improvement to their rating.

External quality assurance activity

Approved centres receive a minimum of one external quality assurance activity per year (1 August to 31 July). This takes the form of either a physical visit to the centre's main site or remote meeting with the centre's key contacts. A visit to the centre's associated sites in addition to, or in place of, a visit to the main site will occur in appropriate circumstances, for example when physical resources are distributed across sites, the practical assessment takes place in sites other than the main site or the external assessment venue is located at a site other than the main site.

Above the minimum standard of one external quality assurance activity per year, external quality assurance activity regarding a centre may be increased in relation to one or more of the following:

- CASS strategy
- a centre has requested an extra external quality assurance visit
- a centre is deemed to be medium or high risk and requires further intervention and support
- YMCA Awards determines that further external quality assurance activity is necessary due to high volume of qualifications, learners and/or other related activity

In situations where an additional external quality assurance activity (a visit or desk-based sampling) is required, a fee may apply; these fees are provided in YMCA Awards [Approval Fees](#) and can be discussed with the centre's allocated YMCA Awards external quality assurer at the time of requesting the additional activity.

External Quality Assurers

The YMCA Awards team of external quality assurers, overseen by the Head of Quality and Assessment, perform a key function in monitoring approved centres through visits to centres, remote external quality assurance activity, and observation of practical and external assessments. This is extended by ongoing support to centres provided by external quality assurers via email and telephone and supported by guidance on quality assurance matters from the YMCA Awards Quality team.

External quality assurers typically externally quality assure the quality of delivery, assessment and internal quality assurance by the centres they monitor by working with the centre to:

- address any queries and discuss development needs the centre may have
- provide the centre with up-to-date information and advice in line with YMCA Awards qualifications and regulatory authority guidance and requirements
- ensure, through appropriate sampling and verification, that assessment arrangements are fit for purpose, and the criteria against which learners performance is differentiated are being applied consistently by assessors within and across sites and centres, and in accordance with the requirements specified within each qualification specification
- confirm that previously identified action points have been met and to review any sanctions applied upon the centre
- confirm that assessments are conducted by appropriately qualified and occupationally competent assessors, in line with YMCA Awards' qualification approval requirements
- confirm that all learners undertake an initial assessment in order to identify barriers to assessment, exemptions and/or recognition of prior learning (RPL)
- sample assessment decisions to confirm that the learner evidence is authentic, reliable and valid, and that national standards are being consistently maintained and regulatory requirements adhered to
- check that assessment decisions are regularly sampled, through internal quality assurance
- check that delivery, assessment and IQA teams are supported appropriately through ongoing training, development and standardisation activities.
- check that claims for certification are authentic, valid and supported by auditable records, and that learners have met the specified level of attainment
- ensure the centre is taking all reasonable steps to mitigate occurrences of malpractice and maladministration.

Further, detailed information about the role of YMCA Awards' external quality assurers can be found [here](#).

Observation of external assessments

There may be occasions when it is deemed necessary for a member of YMCA Awards staff to make an unannounced visit to a centre to observe the conduct of external assessment. The centre should ask for proof that the observer is representing YMCA Awards in an official capacity but should enable the observation to take place unless there is sufficient justification to refuse it (for example, this may be necessary in some cases where a reasonable adjustment has been

applied). Centres should ensure that they keep YMCA Awards informed of scheduled dates for external assessment (for example through the XAMS system) and be aware that unannounced observation visits may take place.

This does not apply to external assessments invigilated via eProctoring.

Observation of practical assessments

In circumstances where it is not possible to arrange a mutually convenient date for the external quality assessor to observe a summative practical assessment, the external quality assessor may visit to observe formative assessments. In all instances, the external quality assessor's visit to observe practical assessments should be facilitated by the centre through the centre providing the external quality assessor with dates that summative practical assessments are taking place. Centres should anticipate that an external quality assurance visit to observe a practical assessment may be in addition to a visit that includes sampling and other checks if it has not been possible to schedule both on the same day.

Centres should be aware that certification may be withheld in instances where YMCA Awards has been prevented from observing practical assessments (on a sampling basis of at least one per year) carried out by the centre and that centres should ensure that they meet the requirements, set out in each applicable qualification specification, for the conduct of practical assessments.

Standardisation and qualification review

YMCA Awards will, from time to time, ask approved centres for copies of learner assessment evidence for the purposes of standardisation and in order to meet regulatory requirements during the conduct of regulator's reviews of specific qualifications. Centres are required to cooperate with all such requests to enable YMCA Awards to meet the regulators' Conditions of Recognition and to ensure that qualification standards are being met consistently across all those involved in the assessment process. YMCA Awards will anonymise any learner assessment evidence and will only share the supplied evidence with appropriate third parties (i.e. external quality assessors and other centres for the purposes of standardisation activity and regulators during qualification reviews).

Centres which have not made sufficient provision to meet this requirement may be subject to an appropriate sanction and so should endeavour to retain copies of learner assessment evidence of an appropriate sample size before returning completed internal assessments to learners. In all cases, learner assessment evidence should not be returned to learners until certificates have been received by the centre, in order to allow for any additional checks that may be required.