



Assessment and Verification: A Guide for Centres offering Essential Skills Wales Qualifications

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Some sections within this document have been derived from the SQA publication *Internal Verification: A guide for centres offering SVQs*. WJEC would like to acknowledge and thank SQA for permission to use and reproduce this work.

1. About this guide

This guide has been produced to provide advice and guidance to centres on assessment and verification arrangements for the Essential Skills Wales suite of qualifications.

It has been designed to support internal assessors and verifiers with their assessment of candidate evidence arising from the completion of the Controlled Task and where applicable, the Structured Discussion. It seeks to explain the purpose of internal verification and specific aspects of internal verification, such as selecting a sample and standardisation. It also seeks to explain the purpose of external verification and what the centre can expect from their external verification visit.

This guide should be read in conjunction with:

- Update to the Design Principles for the Essential Skills Wales suite of qualifications (Qualifications Wales) August 2018
- Essential Skills Wales Suite: Guidance for Practitioners (August 2018)
- Essential Skills Wales Suite of Qualification Handbook (September 2018)
- Practice Confirmatory Test papers and Controlled Tasks
- ESW Suite of Qualifications External Verification/Quality Assurance Visit: Procedures for Centres (June 2019)
- Developing Essential Skills Controlled Tasks (Qualifications Wales) January 2019

Information can be accessed via:

<https://www.wjec.co.uk/qualifications/essential-skills-wales/>

2. Introduction

2.1 ESW Assessment Requirements

To be approved by WJEC to offer Essential Skills Wales (ESW) qualifications, centres must be able to demonstrate that they have in place an effective internal quality assurance system. This process must enable all candidates to be assessed accurately, fairly and consistently to the requirements of the ESW standards.

The assessment requirements for ESW are as follows:

Essential Application of Number Skills (EAoNS) and Essential Communication Skills (EComms)

Candidates are required to demonstrate their skills in both:

- An internally-assessed and externally verified Controlled Task;
- A short, externally marked Confirmatory Test.

The two qualifications are available from Levels 1 – 3. The current ESW Entry 1 – 3 standards and assessment-method will remain in place until 31 August 2022.

Essential Digital Literacy Skills (EDLS)

EDLS consists of *Digital Citizenship, Productivity, Information Literacy, Collaboration, Creativity and Learning* and is available from Entry 1 to Level 3. These six skills will be assessed holistically through:

- an internally-assessed and externally verified Controlled Task;
- a short, internally-assessed and externally verified Structured Discussion.

Essential Employability Skills (EES)

EES is a single, holistic qualification comprising *Critical Thinking and Problem Solving, Planning and Organisation, Creativity and Innovation and Personal Effectiveness*. Available from Entry 3 to Level 3, EES will be assessed through:

- an internally-assessed and externally verified Controlled Task;
- a short, internally- assessed and externally verified Structured Discussion.

2.2 Controlled Tasks

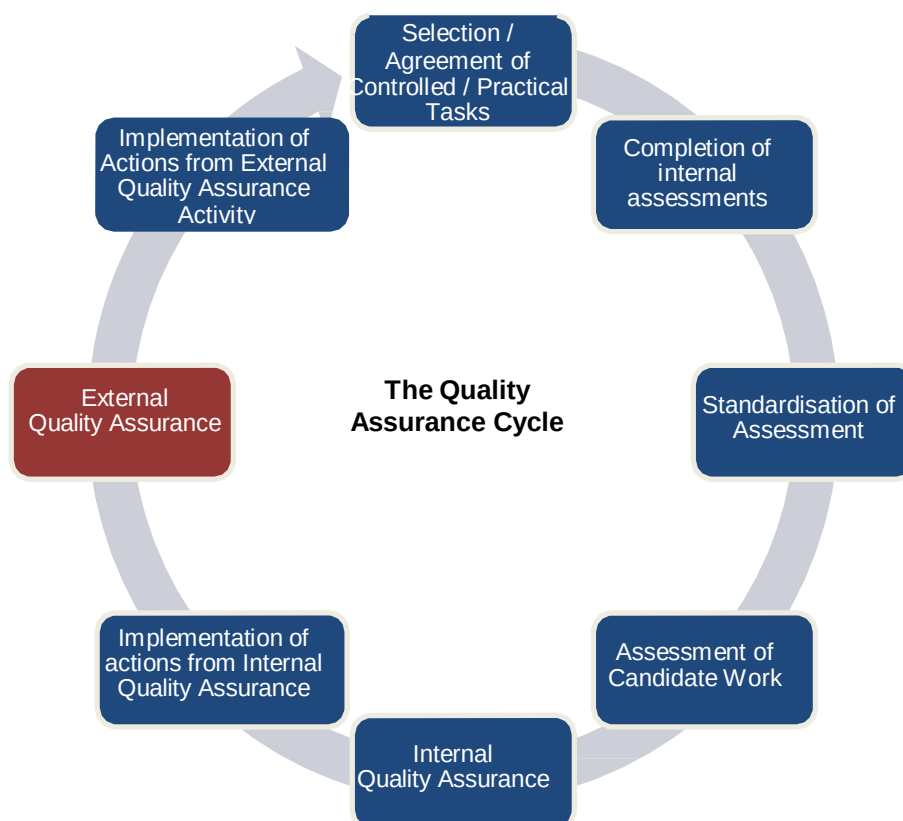
The Controlled Tasks are either produced collectively by the awarding bodies or designed by a centre and approved by WJEC. Centres intending to produce their own tasks should refer to the publication, *Developing Essential Skills Controlled Tasks* (Qualifications Wales) January 2019. Tasks are designed to be a valid measure of the accuracy of an assessment. Assessment is valid when it:

- is appropriate for its purpose
- has been designed to allow candidates to demonstrate sufficient subject-specific skills to meet the requirements of the relevant ESW specification
- allows all assessors to make reliable assessment decisions
- allows the interpretation and inferences which can be drawn from the assessment outcomes to be meaningful and justifiable.

The Controlled Task, Confirmatory Test and Structured Discussion are **summative assessments**. Candidates can only undertake these assessments following teaching and learning when they have developed relevant skills at the required level. Assessments can be taken only once. Learners may, however, undertake a **different** Controlled Task or Confirmatory Test at another time if they do not pass.

3. The Quality Assurance Cycle

Quality assurance of ESW assessment within a centre is managed through a quality assurance cycle as illustrated below.



3.1 Selection of Controlled Tasks

A bank of Controlled Tasks has been produced by the ESW awarding bodies and is accessible to WJEC centres through the secure website. There are a number of generic and contextualised tasks available and centres are able to select a task that is appropriate for the learner being assessed.

3.2 Completion of internal assessment

Controlled Tasks and Structured Discussions must be undertaken under controlled conditions. Arrangements for managing controlled assessment are outlined in the *WJEC Essential Skills Wales suite of qualifications handbook* and assessors and verifiers should refer to this document for further information.

3.3 Standardisation of assessments

It is essential that all assessors share a common understanding of the ESW specification prior to assessment. Standardisation is an essential part of ensuring the consistency of assessors' judgements across different assessors, teaching groups and from year to year. By undertaking a standardisation exercise, assessors will become confident in their judgements and are correctly and consistently applying the mark schemes. Further information on standardisation can be found in section 4.1.

3.4 Assessment of candidate work

Assessors are responsible for ensuring that candidates are aware of the criteria used to assess their work. This will allow candidates to understand what they need to do to gain credit. Controlled Task mark schemes are found in accompanying Assessor Pack and outlines the marking criteria in detail. It is perfectly acceptable for teachers/lecturers to produce a simplified candidate-friendly version, provided that it is not specific to the work of an individual candidate, group of candidates and which is not taken into the controlled environment.

Assessors are required to provide comments on learners' work indicating where learning outcomes and marks have been achieved.

3.5 Internal Verification

Internal verification of assessed work ensures that mark bands are applied consistently by assessors across the centre. It ensures that learners are treated fairly through the assessment process and shows that there is shared understanding across the centre of the standards learners are expected to achieve.

Internal verification should take place within an appropriate timescale after assessment and must be completed prior to the upload of outcomes to Connect, WJEC's registration and certification platform.

Additional information on internal verification, including sampling arrangements can be found in Section 5.

3.6 Implementation of actions arising from internal verification

Where the outcomes of the internal verification process indicate that relevant ESW mark scheme are not being consistently applied and/or there are inconsistencies in assessment decisions, action must be taken to address identified discrepancies in marking. This may result in the work of one or more assessor being remarked by a different assessor, possibly through the use of blind marking.

The internal verification process should be recorded and there must be evidence of the implementation of actions from internal verification.

3.7 External Verification

External verification is the process by which WJEC ensures accurate and consistent standards of assessment across centres and across time. Further information of external verification can be found in section 6 and separately in the document, *ESW Suite of Qualifications External Verification/Quality Assurance Visit: Procedures for Centres*

3.8 Implementation of actions arising from external verification

External Verifiers' reports will be made available to centres electronically through Connect. External verifier reports should be shared with all assessors for information.

Centres are expected to read all feedback provide in external verification reports and must take appropriate action to address any aspects requiring attention and/or strengthening. As a result of its external verification activity, WJEC may assign actions to the centre which will be subject to on-going monitoring activity.

Any significant weaknesses or concerns identified through external verification activity may result in sanctions being applied.

4. Internal assessment

4.1 The purpose of internal assessment

Assessment is the process which determines whether a candidate has demonstrated sufficient specific skills to meet the requirements of the relevant ESW specification. Candidates will need to show they can apply these skills in a holistic manner.

The 'Assessor' is the person designated within a centre with responsibility for judging candidate evidence and recording the outcome of their assessment, which, for ESW, is by awarding marks as indicated on the mark scheme within each Controlled Task Assessor Pack.

The Head of Centre or Quality Assurance Coordinator is responsible for ensuring that there is an appropriate number of assessors to carry out internal assessment.

Assessment for ESW involves candidates generating a potentially diverse range of evidence as they work through the Controlled Task. It is the Assessor's responsibility, with appropriate support from their Internal Verifier, to determine the number of marks that they consider the evidence should achieve.

4.2 Different types of evidence

Evidence produced could take a variety of forms including:

- product evidence such as written documents and supporting notes, etc for ECommS
- completed calculations, graphs and conclusions set out in a report format, etc for EAoNS
- digital outcomes, multi-media evidence, etc for EDLS and EES.
- process evidence such as assessor observation of the discussion/talk for ECommS with the assessor completing the Assessment Record supplied by WJEC as the candidate is observed.
- outcomes of the Structured Discussion between the candidate and their assessor that focuses on evidence already provided through completion of the Controlled Task and accompanying candidate notes.

For quality assurance purposes samples chosen by WJEC for external verification that include process evidence including for the Structured Discussion would need to be supported by further evidence such as audio/video recordings (optional) or observation records completed by an Internal Verifier.

In all instances, evidence must be supported by a completed and authenticated Assessor Pack with all work annotated as appropriate by the assessor. Evidence and completed Assessor Packs must show that the candidate has completed all parts of the Controlled Task.

When confirming to the candidate that they have 'passed' the Assessor must say that the decision is subject to confirmation by the centre's quality assurance.

4.3 Standardisation of internal assessment decisions

A crucial aspect of the quality assurance process is the need to achieve consistency with the way in which candidate assessment evidence is judged. Assessment decisions must be consistent across all assessors for all candidates undertaking the same assessment task and it is essential that all assessors share a common understanding of the ESW specification and assessment requirements prior to marking internal assessments.

There are different ways of carrying out standardisation, depending on the nature of the evidence. The internal verifier should ensure that the most appropriate method is used for example:

The following examples are standardisation exercises used by centres:

- Double marking of Controlled Task outcomes against the completed mark scheme allows assessors to review the same candidate evidence to check each other's application of the mark scheme. Alternatively, the evidence can be divided so that the same assessor assesses the same section across all candidates. This allows each assessor a better chance to understand and apply associated assessment schemes. In either case, particular attention should be paid to 'borderline' decisions.
- When assessing process evidence, such as discussions for ECommS and the outcomes of the Structured Discussion, consider (with the agreement of the candidate) making audio/video recordings that are assessed collectively, perhaps involving pairs of assessors carrying out dual assessment. Both should initially make independent judgements, and then discuss any discrepancies and reach a consensus.
- Blind marking is where evidence is marked by two assessors, but each is unaware of the other's mark. Discrepancies between the marks can then be resolved. In another form, evidence can be made anonymous by removing the candidate's details.

5. Internal Verification

5.1 The purpose of internal verification

Verification is a crucial element of quality assurance as a robust system will help ensure that all candidates are assessed fairly and consistently against the requirements the ESW specifications. WJEC maintains national standards within and across centres using a range of external verification methods, and centres must ensure that their candidates are assessed accurately and consistently in line with these standards.

Each WJEC ESW centre is responsible for operating an effective and documented internal quality assurance system. This is a requirement of being an approved centre and is checked first at the centre-approval stage (via a completed and approved *Qualification Approval Form*) and through subsequent external verification visits. WJEC does recognise, however, that there are many different ways of operating effective internal quality assurance processes. For example, the internal verification system for a smaller PRU will be different from that of FE College.

Another aspect is where a centre operates across multiple assessment sites. In all instances, it is the centre's responsibility to use a system that is appropriate for its organisational structure, the ESW specification and its candidates. WJEC, as part of the qualification approval process, will undertake a risk-assessment to identify any potential deficiencies at the outset.

As ESW assessment includes some internally-assessed and externally verified components the purpose of internal verification is to ensure that these principles are met, regardless of the particular system used by a centre.

The internal verifier's role is critical in ensuring that assessments are appropriately conducted, and that any possibility of malpractice is minimised. An effective internal verification system will ensure that:

- assessments are capable of generating sufficient evidence to allow candidates to show that
- they have met the ESW standards
- all assessors are familiar with the ESW standards
- assessors reach accurate and consistent decisions for the same qualification for all candidates in their centre in line with ESW standards.

5.2 Centres' responsibilities

Centres are responsible for organising internal verification. This includes ensuring that all candidates have equal and fair access to assessment, scheduling assessments, ensuring that accurate internal verification records are kept and preparing for external verification. The timing of assessment, including the policy on re-assessment opportunities, should be agreed in advance of the actual assessment.

It is the centre's responsibility to ensure that all Internal Verifiers are competent in their role and that they understand and apply the internal quality assurance system consistently. An effective selection and induction process and any training or development needs for Internal Verifiers should be identified.

Centres must have a written procedure, including schedules and methodology, so that all assessors and Internal Verifiers understand the quality assurance process. These procedures must be periodically reviewed, and any relevant External Verification feedback incorporated.

Effective internal verification is an ongoing process. It allows good practice to be shared and can help identify potential problems at an early stage. Leaving internal verification to the end of the assessment process is poor practice and can jeopardise candidates' chances of gaining qualifications because there may not be sufficient time to carry out remedial action or re-assessment.

5.3 The role of the internal verifier

- The internal verifier or internal verification team is responsible for ensuring the validity of internal assessments and the reliability of assessors' judgements. This responsibility has several parts:
- arranging standardisation exercises
- sampling assessment decisions
- maintaining assessment and verification records

Once Internal Verifiers are satisfied that these requirements have been met, they act as 'guarantors' that the ESW standards are being met.

Please note that no individual can act as assessor and internal verifier for the same group of candidates.

5.4 Supporting assessors

The internal verifier must have an appropriate qualification and/or expertise in the subject area and must be familiar with the ESW standards.

The internal verifier is responsible for ensuring that the chosen assessment instrument is valid, fair and practicable. This means they need to have knowledge of the different sources of evidence that candidates might generate when completing a Controlled Task.

The internal verifier can have a developmental role for less experienced assessors by offering advice and guidance. This kind of support should be ongoing throughout the qualification, and not be left to the point of assessment for certification purposes.

5.5 Arranging standardisation exercises

Reliability is a measure of the accuracy and consistency of assessors' judgements. Standardisation is an important part of ensuring the reliability of assessment decisions for all candidates in a centre.

Standardisation exercises identify any discrepancies between assessors in their judgement of candidates' evidence and allow adjustments to be made to remedy these. As well as reducing subjectivity among assessors, it helps to improve the consistency of their judgements and allows Internal Verifiers to identify and disseminate good practice.

There are different ways of carrying out standardisation as outlined in section 4.1 and the internal verifier should make sure that the method used is the most appropriate for the nature of the evidence.

5.6 Sampling assessment decisions

The internal verifier should select a sample of candidate evidence to check that each assessor is making consistent decisions in line with the requirements of the ESW specification.

Sampling must be ongoing through the assessment process, not end-loaded. This allows the internal verifier to review assessment judgements and identify potential problems at an early stage and will allow support or training to be provided to assessors.

A range of assessment methods should be included in the sample. Different centres have different sampling regimes and sample size. The selection of a completely random sample has strengths, but the critical aspect of any sample is that it must be sufficient to ensure consistency of assessment decisions across each qualification. Over time, all assessors and assessment methods should be included in the sample. It is good practice to document all sampling strategies in a written internal verification procedure.

There are several key features that should be considered in selecting a sample. These include:

- first time delivery of an ESW qualification or award
- new assessor
- range of levels of qualifications range of candidate groups
- mode of delivery (full/part time, online, multiple sites, partnership arrangement)

- age and gender of candidates
- achieved/not achieved
- revised assessment instruments
- previous issues or problems identified by internal or external verification cost and resource effectiveness.

The outcomes of internal verification should be given as feedback to the assessors and used to refine assessment. This is why it is essential that sampling takes place throughout the assessment process as it ensures fairness to all candidates.

All work that is sampled, whether it is the outcome of a whole Controlled Task or individual parts, must 'signed off' by the internal verifier before candidates' results are uploaded to WJEC Connect. This can be done by countersigning the assessor's form, by using an internal verification checklist, or by some other means devised by the centre.

Evidence that an internal verification process has taken place must be available for scrutiny by WJEC.

Where the internal verification process identifies weaknesses with an individual assessor, WJEC expects the centre to act to ensure that these weaknesses are addressed. This could mean that:

- additional training is provided to the assessor being allowed to undertake any further assessment
- all assessment decisions of the assessor are subject to internal verification until such a time that the internal verifier has confidence that assessor understands and is applying the required standards.

6. External Verification

6.1 The purpose of external verification

External verification is the process by which WJEC confirms that assessment decisions in centres are:

- made by competent and qualified assessors
- the product of reliable and fair assessment practice
- recorded accurately and appropriately
- in accordance with the requirements of the ESW qualification as published in the qualification specification.

6.2 External verification visits

Monitoring visits to each approved centre will normally take place each year. In certain circumstances, e.g. low volume of candidates or when centres are awarded Direct Claim Status, this may be replaced by desk-based scrutiny. Additional centre visits may be undertaken upon request.

WJEC reserves the right to make a visit to a centre at short notice or without prior notification e.g. to observe the conduct and invigilation of Controlled Tasks.

It is important that the Internal Verifier is present when the External Verifier carries out a visit so that they are able to discuss the internal verification process. When arranging a visit to a centre, the External Verifier will confirm:

- the date, time and approximate length of the visit
- the site(s) to be visited
- the names of the candidates, assessors and (where relevant) other Internal Verifiers they wish to meet.

External verification visits provide an important opportunity for centres to seek support and guidance and for External Verifiers to update centre staff on emerging best practice in assessment and internal verification.

External Verifiers will need access to information on centre activities so that they can:

- evaluate internal arrangements
- agree a sampling plan
- collect the information that WJEC needs to carry out quality assurance monitoring report on all aspects of the internal assessment and verification against the approved
- centre and qualification approval criteria and make any further recommendations.

During the visit the External Verifier will look at the quality and consistency of assessment decisions and assessment practice. This involves:

- sampling candidate assessments
- speaking with candidates and assessors to ensure that evidence and records of assessment are both valid and authentic
- reviewing records of assessment, internal verification and team meetings reviewing procedures.

6.3 Sampling

Our External Verifiers will sample both internal assessment and internal quality assurance decisions. The sample will vary from centre to centre and will depend on how long the centre has been approved to deliver ESW qualifications, staff familiarity with the qualifications and the number of candidates and assessment sites.

6.4 External Verifier Reports

External Verifiers will report on information and evidence under the following headings:

- management systems
- resources
- monitoring the assessment process internal verification

Feedback will be provided at the end of the visit and will include:

- the identification of good practice
- discussing areas requiring further development, including sanctions if applicable and formulating an action plan.

External verification procedures are detailed in the document, *ESW Suite of Qualifications External Verification/Quality Assurance Visit: Procedures for Centres*.

7. Maintaining assessment and verification records

All assessment results leading to ESW certification must be signed by the Internal Verifier. This is commonly done by countersigning the assessor's form or using an internal verification checklist, but it could be done by other means devised by the centre. The important point is that clear and accurate records of effective internal verification activity are kept, and that they are available to the External Verifier and to WJEC.

The records that are kept will include:

- validated assessment material
- reports of any meetings, including standardisation exercises records of observation of assessment
- checklists/marking schemes candidate records
- records of all sampling activity
- feedback to assessors

How this information is held and updated is at the discretion of the centre, but it must be stored securely and in a retrievable format.

The External Verifier will scrutinise candidates' evidence across as wide a range as possible and will sample the work of all assessors and Internal Verifiers.