

1 September 2013

REPORT FOR PUBLICATION

1. The qualifications and standards

Assessment Team:	Findings: <p>Reports confirm that generally staff development in centres is in place and ongoing.</p> <p>In general OCR approved centres that offer the OCR Awards, Certificates and Diplomas in Retail Skills at levels one, two and three, have qualified, competent and experienced assessment and Internal Quality Assurance teams.</p> <p>During EQA visits OCR External Verifiers have met with the majority of the centres assessors and IQA staff confirming their relevant qualifications and ongoing professional development. Many centres offer a range of support to enable their staff to maintain their ongoing professional competence.</p> <p>The size of candidate cohorts and the number of active assessors responsible for their assessment has been reviewed to ensure that candidate/assessor ratios are not excessive.</p> <p>Discussions have taken place to confirm that centre managers allocate sufficient time for assessors to support their candidates and that centre standardisation meetings/activities are taking place. This is to ensure that the same standard of assessment is provided to all candidates and that this standard of assessment meets current requirements.</p>
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<p>Resources:</p>	<p>Findings:</p> <p>There were no significant concerns reported. Where the centre is an employer resources such as training facilities are in place.</p> <p>If the centre is not the employer, with assessment taking place on the employers premises, centres carry out risk assessments and inspections of these assessment locations before candidates start assessment.</p> <p>Centres provide resources for the training and induction of candidates with the provision of notes, hand-outs and candidate workbooks to provide information, advice and guidance.</p>
<p>Candidate Support:</p>	<p>Findings:</p> <p>EQA Reports confirm that candidate/assessor ratios are acceptable and that assessors have the time and authority to carry out their duties.</p> <p>Candidates interviewed confirm that they are suitably inducted and well supported. Although few seem to understand the IQA role they do state that they understand how to make an appeal.</p> <p>Many centres initially assess candidates using a skill scan and other suitable initial induction materials. These materials normally include the appeals procedure, equality issues, and the background to the qualification plus guidance on evidence, assessment and portfolio building.</p> <p>Initial assessment has ensured that assessment methods meet the needs of both the candidate and OCR. Observation has been widely used along with questioning and product evidence (e.g. records, reports and notes produced as part of work role).</p>
<p>Assessment and Verification:</p>	<p>Findings:</p> <p>Reports of EQA visits indicate that centres are operating to the quality standard required. Sampling by IQA staff includes some observation of assessment.</p> <p>In some cases centres use photographic, audio recorded or video evidence in addition to observational assessments. This adds to the authenticity of the evidence. Line managers often also provide testimony of candidate competence. More use could be made of substantial witness testimony by assessors.</p>

	<p>Feedback from EQA meetings and reports is generally disseminated to the IQA and assessment team and any actions indicated have generally been put in place within the required timescale.</p> <p>On only a few occasions were sanctions applied and these were mainly at level one with just two at level 2 and one at level 3. The actions that had led to these sanctions were normally cleared by the required dates and did not lead to escalation.</p>
<p>Management Systems and Records:</p>	<p>Findings:</p> <p>Reports confirm that in all cases centres have provided access to the candidate's, portfolios and members of the assessment team requested by the EV in advance of the visit.</p> <p>Policies and Procedures have generally been found to meet the requirements of both OCR and the QCF qualifications. Where changes have been needed then centres have readily updated them.</p> <p>EQA reports indicate that centre management systems are fit for purpose and provide information that is accurate and current. Generally records have been well maintained and give an accurate and current picture of assessment progress.</p> <p>Communication has been maintained between centres and their EV with the notification of significant changes that could affect their ability to offer the qualification (e.g. staffing).</p>
<p>Assessment Summary:</p>	<p>Findings:</p> <p>EV's report that the revised QCF standards have been fully implemented by centres.</p> <p>EQA reports confirm that EV's have sampled portfolios at all stages of the assessment process. In most cases EV's have also sampled assessment plans, candidate progress reviews and inductions materials.</p> <p>Candidates are assessed over a reasonable period of time ensuring that assessment decisions on competence are reliable and meet the requirements of assessment practice as set out in the assessor qualification standards. Line managers are involved in all assessments as required to confirm ongoing competence and to provide specific witness testimony on occasions.</p>

2. Sector Developments

Although there are indications that the economy may be starting to gradually recover it will take some time for this to filter to the areas of training and assessment. Many employers are still reluctant to invest in staff development unless there is a legal requirement and in the case of the retail environment this is generally restricted to Health and safety and food hygiene training.

There is still much uncertainty in the sector and we see this with many empty shop units on high streets and in shopping centres. These units are often vacant for considerable periods of time. In some cases large companies have gone into administration resulting in the loss of many jobs leaving a surplus of experienced retail staff in the locality. All of this has resulted in fewer requirements for staff to train and become qualified, although apprentice training where funded is still buoyant.

This overall reduction in size of the sector has significantly reduced the number of candidates undertaking the OCR qualifications in retail skills.