

**ATHE Centre  
Assessment Standards  
Scrutiny (CASS)  
Strategy**

## Section 1: Context

This CASS strategy exists within the context of a range of quality assurance measures which ATHE has put in place. For example, there are robust processes to ensure that all centres meet required standards, before they are allowed to recruit learners to ATHE qualifications, deliver, quality assure and assess learner work. In addition, the appointment and monitoring of External Quality Assurers (EQAs) follow set procedures and EQAs apply prescribed sampling rules and produce detailed reports for all centres and learner work (see template in Appendix 1). The judgements in the reports are internally checked before any certification takes place. There are also updates, induction and training arrangements for EQAs, as well as a dedicated Associate Information webpage.

ATHE offers a range of qualifications from Level 1 to 7. Assessment of ATHE qualifications is by different assessment methods, typically leading to the creation of a portfolio of evidence for each registered learner. These methods include completion of:

- ATHE designed sample assignments set in a vocational context
- ATHE approved centre devised assignments set in a vocational context.
- Centre designed and set summative time constrained assessments testing knowledge and understanding.

ATHE centres are permitted to assess evidence produced by learners. The evidence for ATHE qualifications mainly takes the form of written assignments which have a variety of tasks within them, and which enable the learner to achieve the learning outcomes at the standards set by the assessment criteria. Such tasks include:

- Presentations
- Reports
- Planning documentation
- Logs or diaries
- Reviews
- Charts and diagrammatic information
- Multiple choice questions
- Research papers

A small number of ATHE centres use timed constrained summative assessments or tests as their assessment methods. This learner evidence forms part of a portfolio of learner work. ATHE does not provide the questions for such assessments but allows centres to do so. The questions are written by subject area specialists, placed into question banks and papers, and are taken under controlled conditions carefully managed by the centre and in accordance with the ATHE Policy on Time Constrained Assessments. Centres are also permitted to mark such assessments and where appropriate provide either supervisors or trained invigilators to administer the assessment. ATHE requires centres to provide copies of

the assessments prior to use or to enable review of any questions held electronically. This provides a check on the appropriateness of the questions and ensures learners are able to meet the given standards in the qualification. ATHE carries out an annual audit of the assessment process by observing the assessment being conducted.

ATHE permits centres to assess learner work as they have competent, qualified or sector experienced assessors in place who are able to apply the qualification and unit standards to the work of the learner. Centres are required to have a robust internal quality assurance process that checks the work of the assessors to ensure that their assessment judgements are sound, robust and in line with qualification standards.

ATHE risk rates its centres based upon relevant criteria with four levels of risk. These are based on a 'RAG Rating' scheme of Red, Weak Amber, Amber and Green. All levels of risk may attract actions for the centres following an EQA activity and lead to intervention by ATHE as appropriate. This includes additional visits, training, increasing the level and frequency of sampling and as required sanctions.

Centres are required to use reputable plagiarism software to check all learners' work for plagiarism prior to assessment. This requirement supports the quality assurance process in the identification and elimination of plagiarism and supports assessors in making valid judgments. The provision of software reports to EQAs support the external moderation and verification processes.

## **Section 2: Moderation and Verification**

ATHE has developed this CASS Strategy and the moderation and verification processes to ensure that centres continue to assess and quality assure its qualifications to the required standards. The use of the terms moderation and verification, in this policy, differentiate the timing of the assessment scrutiny, in the student's learning cycle and are directly related to the performance of the centre and the risk rating it has achieved. Centres which have demonstrated consistently high standards and have high performing status (HPS) will have verification of their learners' work. Centres which are not in this category will have moderation of learner work. A consistency in processes will be maintained between moderation and verification, so that irrespective of the timing of the assessment scrutiny, or the past performance of the centre, there is evidenced legitimacy of the outcomes.

The monitoring and judgements of centre performance, and specifically the validity of assessment, will be undertaken through visits to centres, conversations with centre staff and learners as appropriate, sampling of learner work both remote and in-centre, checking assessor and IQA decision records and desktop reviewing of centre policies and processes. ATHE will also take into account communications from other AOs, the Regulators and inspection agencies, which relate to individual centres.

For ATHE to be able to scrutinise centre assessment decisions at either moderation or verification, ATHE requires centres to retain complete accurate learner records and relevant documentation. These records must be retained for at least five years from completion of all qualifications. This is in line with ATHE policy and means that all learner work and associated documentation is available to ATHE upon request. This documentation must include assessment and quality assurance records, certificate claims, learner work, enquiries and appeals, and learner data for each qualification. This requirement is contained within the ATHE Centre Agreement, which is agreed and signed by the centre on its recognition.

## **2.1 Verification for the Highest Performing Centres**

Verification activities can be undertaken at various points throughout the programme of study, although learners will normally have completed their programme of study and are seeking certification or they have produced assessed work for 50% of the units in those qualifications. Where centres have multiple start dates for learners on a programme, the number of units completed for later enrolments will be less, although the learner work will be included in the sampling process. Before verification can take place, centres will be required to provide all the assessed learner work for the cohort(s), the assessment and internal quality assurance records, including sampling plans, records for any standardisation meetings conducted and plagiarism reports. The verification process will take place before any learner results are issued.

Verification will involve a variety of activities, including checking the application of centre policies and processes in practice, speaking to centre staff and learners and sampling learner work, according to the agreed sample for the centre and the qualification being verified. The size of the sample will typically be for 5 learners plus 10% of any additional learners in the cohort, for each qualification offered. However the sample will cover all assessors; all ATHE qualifications offered by the centre; any graded judgements; work which has been subject to internal quality assurance and take into consideration the nature of the tasks, which learners have been set. This process is directly comparable with moderation and will enable ATHE to have confidence in the validity of internal assessment judgements. The outcomes of the verification will lead to a report, which is shared with the centre. Where the EQA does not have confidence in assessor judgements, internal quality assurance processes and completion of documentation, the centre will be subject to moderation of learner work. This will take place on completion of the learning for all learners and before results can be issued.

Following verification centres are assigned a rating that denotes a level of risk with the centre. These are Green, Amber, Weak Amber and Red and will impact on the extent of future verification processes. Issues with verification in a centre will impact on the centre risk status register and will lead to the removal of HPS.

## 2.2 Moderation for Other Centres

Moderation activities take place at the conclusion of a learner's programme following assessment and internal quality assurance by the centre and prior to certification. This will ensure that centre assessor decisions are valid and in accordance with the qualification requirements. For a specific sampling activity for an individual qualification, ATHE requires centres to provide all the learner work for that cohort, the assessment and internal quality assurance records, including sampling plans, standardisation meeting records and plagiarism reports. Where any of these documents are not provided a judgement is made as to whether the sampling activity can proceed without them. This information is contained with the ATHE 'Delivering ATHE Qualifications' (DAQ) handbook which is available to all centres on the ATHE website.

At moderation the sample will cover the assessment judgements of every assessor, across any graded judgements which have been made. The sample will also cover every unit which has been assessed and take into consideration the nature of the tasks, which learners have been set. The exact sample will be determined by the EQA but he/she will start with a minimum sample size of 10 learners plus 10% of the remaining cohort. Where a centre is offering more than one qualification, this minimum size will apply to each qualification. The sample will also include internally quality assured learner work. The process is designed to be rigorous but at the same time positive and supportive and is intended to highlight areas of good practice as well as identify any areas of concern. Moderation may mean that sampling activities are undertaken a number of times throughout the year dependent upon the completion of learning in the centre. This approach means that sampling of learner work occurs more frequently. The result is that successful learners receive their certificates in a timely manner and there are frequent checks of assessor decisions.

Following these activities centres are assigned a rating that denotes a level of risk with the centre. These are Green, Amber, Weak Amber and Red.

Where centres are rated Green but still have actions these are monitored and checked for completion by the EQA at the next sampling activity.

Centres assigned as Amber, Weak Amber or Red may have their actions monitored by the Regional Standards Manager or Quality and Assessment Manager as part of the ATHE Intervention Strategy. The interventions are in place to make certain that centres achieve their actions, work to the required standards and evidence confirms this.

In some circumstances, particularly in centres which provide distance learning and have different start and completion dates for learners, there may not be enough learners to warrant a full external quality assurance sampling as described above. In these cases where there is only one learner the EQA will sample a minimum of 50% of the units and the judgements of all assessors. Only the learner work section of the EQA report will be completed. Where there are two learners the EQA will complete the normal sampling procedure. Only the learner work section of the EQA report will be completed.



This strategy provides for robust levels of sampling leading to judgements on assessor decisions that assure the integrity of the qualification or facilitates identification of areas for action.

### **Section 3: Managing Risk**

In addition to the information provided above, ATHE has other processes in place to identify and mitigate risks in relation to the delivery of its qualifications and assessment.

There is a Conflicts of Interests policy in place which requires all ATHE employees and associates to declare any actual and potential conflicts of interest they may have on an annual basis. There is a requirement to bring any emerging conflict of interest to the attention of managers within ATHE. Identified conflicts are reviewed and measures put in place to mitigate such conflicts. Centres are also required to have a Conflicts of Interest policy that includes a process to identify and manage conflicts.

All ATHE centres are required to use reputable software for checking of plagiarism in learner work. All learner assignments must be checked by centres for plagiarism using the software and the results provided with the learner work for EQA sampling. Centres must ensure that the use of such software is included in a relevant centre policy, so it is established practice. This ensures that plagiarism is identified, and appropriate action taken by centres to investigate and deal with it. Moderation or verification will not take place when learner work is not accompanied by a plagiarism report.

EQAs are required to be vigilant for instances of centre and / or learner malpractice including plagiarism, and to report this to ATHE so that established, published procedures can be implemented to investigate the matter. ATHE uses this approach together with its whistleblowing procedures and in-house quality assurance processes to identify centre and learner malpractice. There is an established Malpractice and Maladministration policy that clearly lays out the procedure for investigation of malpractice. This includes referring the issue to the Head of Centre for local investigation and carrying out the investigation using ATHE staff.

Where an EQA disagrees with the centre assessor decision for a particular learner, the EQA may change the grade or fail the work appropriately. The EQA must ensure that the reasons for changing the grade or failing are clearly documented within the EQA report, so that the centre is provided with feedback, so it understands why the grade has been changed. The EQA will also have a conversation with staff at the centre to explain the outcomes of the moderation/verification. This will allow the centre to take action to ensure similar erroneous judgements are not repeated. ATHE requires centres to read the EQA report and provide feedback to its assessors and IQAs on the feedback from the EQA. Centres are required to take action to ensure the feedback and action points raised by the EQA in the report are acted upon.

Where it is discovered that centres are not assessing in accordance with the qualification requirements ATHE will seek to develop centre practice through support, guidance, and training. In addition, ATHE will, and has, withdrawn centre approval and transferred learners to a different centre or taken action to prevent further registration of learners until issues around assessment have been resolved. These steps are not taken lightly but are carefully considered, at all times having the learner's best interest in mind.

When developing qualifications ATHE provides 'sample assignments' for use by centres as a vehicle for assessing learners. These assignments are written by subject experts and are subject to an internal quality assurance process to ensure that the assignments are fit for purpose. The review of the assignments is documented and, where necessary amendments are made before the assignment is made available for use by centres. ATHE reviews its sample assignments regularly to ensure they are current and there is no model answers available to learners.

Centres are permitted to develop their own assignments however these must be submitted to ATHE for review prior to the centre using them with learners. The review is documented, and feedback is provided to the centre. Where changes are required the centre is expected to undertake this and then return the assignment to ATHE for further review and confirmation that it can be used.

Centres are required to review their assignments to ensure they remain fit for use and where changes are made they are submitted to ATHE for review.

## **Section 4: Ongoing Review**

ATHE carries out annual reviews of its policies and processes and makes necessary and appropriate amendments. Policies that affect centres are published on the ATHE website and centres are advised of any changes in the regular Centre Update. Policies and procedures are also amended when required by external changes and requirements, such as changes to regulatory requirements.

### **Appendix 1**

[External Verification/Moderation Report](#)