



OCNSWR

**GUIDELINES for N/OCN
EXTERNAL VERIFIERS
2009 – 2010**



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Foreword

Welcome to returning and new verifiers and our thanks for the great work you do as ambassadors for OCN.

We hope that you will enjoy working for OCNSWR this year and we look forward to receiving your feedback and sharing good practice.

Please do not hesitate to contact us with any queries, observations, recommendations etc

judith.byrne@ocnswr.org.uk Director of Quality

lorraine.osborne@ocnswr.org.uk Quality Support Officer

The following Guidelines have been produced as a reference for External Verifiers working alongside N/OCN Quality Reviewers to provide subject specific expertise for particular qualifications and/or curriculum areas. Further information relating to quality assurance may also be found in the N/OCN Centre Handbook <http://www.nocn.org.uk/learning-providers/recognised-centre-handbook>



Centre Recognition

In order to deliver N/OCN accredited courses, all centres must apply for and achieve recognised status.

With the assistance of their allocated OCN Development Manager, centres complete an application process and sign up to meeting the requirements specified. Compliance with centre recognition requirements is then monitored over time by the N/OCN Quality Reviewer responsible for that centre.

Direct Claims Status

Recognised centres may submit applications to OCNSWR for approval of named Internal Verifiers to sign off the award of credit. Approval is granted by the Quality Reviewer for the centre to those people who meet the specified criteria and whose internal verification practice has been checked and approved.

If you have been asked to verify provision where an approved internal verifier is in place, you will be given relevant details by Lorraine Osborne and are required to monitor and report on internal verification practice as part of your role.

The Role of the Quality Reviewer

The Quality Reviewer acts as a key link between OCNSWR and Centres in all matters relating to Centre Recognition and Quality Assurance policies and procedures.

The role of the Quality Reviewer includes:

- Liaising with named persons in Centres with overall responsibility for quality assurance, internal verification, acting on OCNSWR External Verifier reports and the review of NOCN Qualifications and OCN courses
- Contacting Centre Representatives on a regular basis and at least once a year to monitor and review quality assurance arrangements and Awarding Body requirements
- Monitoring all quality assurance processes as specified in the Centre Recognition agreement
- Working with the OCNSWR Director of Quality to co-ordinate and support the work of External Verifiers
- Scrutinising External Verifier reports and following up identified actions
- Participating in regional and national Sector Standardisation events
- Supporting and advising on quality improvement measures



Subject Verification

Job Purpose

To ensure the quality and consistency of awards within and between Centres.

Core Functions

1.	To act as the External Verifier for named Qualifications and/or specified courses in N/OCN Recognised Approved Centres.
2.	To ensure that NOCN/OCN units and qualifications are delivered and assessed in accordance with the approved specifications
3.	To verify the process for the award of credit to learners through a rigorous process of sampling of assessment and learner evidence of achievement
4.	To ensure rigorous processes for the assessment, tracking and recording of individual learner achievements are in place at the Centre in accordance with NOCN/OCN requirements.
5.	To sign off recommendations for the award of credit where no internal verifiers have been approved to do so.
6.	To monitor and report on internal verification practice.
7.	To approve Centre devised assessment tasks for units and qualifications against specified NOCN criteria.
8.	To submit reports as required to the OCN on the quality and consistency of award of credit at the Centres.
9.	To record requests for advice from Centre staff on quality assurance processes and arrangements and to forward any such requests to the Director of Quality for response.
10.	To take part in training and development activities as required.
11.	To produce reports on time and in the correct format.

Person Specification

- 1 Appropriate Assessor/Verifier qualification
- 2 Effective and sensitive oral and written communicator
- 3 Sound understanding and experience of QA processes and procedures



Standards of Conduct for OCNSWR External Verifiers

All OCNSWR External Verifiers will:

- Comply with all current OCNSWR External Verifier Guidelines
- Attend Verifier Training and Review Meetings as requested by the OCNSWR Director of Quality.
- Conduct themselves in a professional manner and act in the best interests of OCNSWR and NOCN at all times
- Inform OCNSWR of any changes of professional status which could affect their eligibility to act as a External Verifier
- Comply with the Health and Safety and Equal Opportunities policies and procedures of OCNSWR and the centres visited for verification
- Act in accordance with the Seven Principles of Public Life (Nolan Principles) listed below by declaring any conflicts of interest that may arise in the course of their work for OCNSWR.



The Seven Nolan Principles:

Selflessness

Holders of public office should take decisions solely in terms of the public interest. They should not do so in order to gain financial or other material benefits for themselves, their family, or their friends.

Integrity

Holders of public office should not place themselves under any financial or other obligation to outside individuals or organisations that might influence them in the performance of their official duties.

Objectivity

In carrying out public business, including making public appointments, awarding contracts, or recommending individuals for awards or benefits, holders of public office should make choices on merit.

Accountability

Holders of public office are accountable for their decisions and actions to the public and must submit themselves to whatever scrutiny is appropriate to their office.

Openness

Holders of public office should be as open as possible about all the decisions and actions they take. They should give reasons for their decisions and restrict information only when the wider public interest clearly demands.

Honesty

Holders of public office have a duty to declare any private interests relating to their public duties and to take steps to resolve any conflicts arising in a way that protects the public interest.

Leadership

Holders of public office should promote and support these principles by leadership and example.



NOCN Code of Practice on Verification

General Purpose of Verification

The OCN will ensure that effective systems and procedures operate to externally verify evidence of learner achievement so that all awards and qualifications are valid and consistent both within the OCN and consistent across OCNs. The OCN will also ensure that all processes leading to awards and qualifications pay due regard to fairness and equity. All procedures and processes will be cyclical in their design and operate to ensure systematic quality assurance and continuous improvement.

Operational Specifications

Internal Verification

OCNs will ensure that all assessment decisions and practices are internally verified and standardised by each NOCN Centre. The OCN will:

- Provide to NOCN Centres explicit guidance on internal verification detailing minimum requirements and models of best practice.
- Approve and record the details through formal processes of the application to each programme of a NOCN Centre's arrangements for internal verification. This should include details of responsibilities, record keeping, sampling and actioning
- Through the appointed Quality Reviewers and External Verifiers, monitor and report on the effectiveness of internal verification arrangements, making recommendations for quality improvement and/or applying sanctions as appropriate.

External Verifier Appointments

All External Verifiers will:

- Be appointed according to an explicit and published set of criteria, which includes details of required subject expertise, professional experience/knowledge and/or qualifications.
- Be free of any financial, contractual or other obligations to a NOCN Centre, which may compromise their ability to act with integrity in respect of awards and qualifications to learners.
- Undertake duties according to their contract, which explicitly sets out responsibilities to the OCN.

OCNSWR undertakes to appoint the minimum number of verifiers that is consistent with maintaining high standards according to the capacity of the OCN to provide adequate quality control, training and support.

External Verifier Activities

The OCN will ensure that an External Verifier in all circumstances:

- Carries out their duties on behalf of the OCN according to explicit and published guidance, which details expected schedules, procedures and actions.
- Verifies the achievement of learners leading to awards and qualifications as valid and reliable.
- Carries out sampling according to the explicit and published guidance provided by the OCN, which must include details of the nature and size of samples and mechanisms to verify secure decisions.
- Has available to them explicit procedures to follow if there are any doubts about the adequacy or validity of evidence.



External Verifier Support and Training

OCNs will ensure that all External Verifiers have:

- Defined requirements in terms of training and/or qualification including the specified period within which this will need to be completed.
- Available to them comprehensive and up to date documentation in respect of their responsibilities and activities.
- Available to them a readily accessible source of support.
- Regular opportunities to review the accuracy and consistency of their performance against the required standards of the OCN.
- Opportunities to identify development action points as appropriate to the above.
- Access to information and training designed to keep them up to date and maintain high standards of professional performance.

Reporting

For each Qualification/course verified the OCN will:

- Provide regular written feedback (normally at least annually) to a NOCN Centre detailing the effectiveness of assessment, including internal verification arrangements.
- Have in place explicit guidance and procedures for the recording of evidence by external verifiers and the reporting of findings to NOCN Centres including their responsibilities in respect of responding to reports.
- Have in place explicit procedures for the monitoring of the process of reporting to NOCN Centres including the action points identified within reports and any subsequent failure to act.

Appeals

OCNs will have in place procedures, which ensure that NOCN Centres have a defined right of appeal against verification decisions.

Benchmarks

OCNs will ensure that verification practice and procedures meet NOCN requirements.

Integration with other Codes

This Code of Practice must be implemented in conjunction with other NOCN Codes.



Documentation

What documentation does an OCNSWR External Verifier need before carrying out any verification activities?

- A current, signed Verification Contract for the course
- The approved course units
- The last Verification Report if the course has run before
- For NOCN Qualifications or Qualifications Units, the Qualification Guide plus additional guidance QG1 and Appeals, Malpractice and Special Arrangements Documentation.

Verifiers should contact OCNSWR if they do not have any of the above **before** any verification takes place.

What paperwork does the Verifier need to complete?

- Confirmation of Verification Visit Arrangements
- Copy RAC to record sampling activities
- Interim/Annual Verification Report
- Expenses Claim

The use of this paperwork is essential to ensure standardisation of verification across all OCNSWR courses. The Interim and Annual Verification Reports are auditable documents, which must be word-processed and all sections must be completed. All supporting paperwork should be returned to OCNSWR with the Annual Report. All reports should be completed and forwarded to OCNSWR by 31 July at the latest. This is to ensure that centres receive reports and responses from OCNSWR for the beginning of the next academic year.

Training

OCNSWR provides a series of verifier training events during the year.

New verifiers are required to attend an induction session before starting to verify and are offered the opportunity to work shadow experienced verifiers.

Experienced verifiers are expected to attend an updating/review session at least once every year to ensure standardisation and the sharing of best practice. They may also be asked to participate, as a subject expert, in regional standardisation events.



The Verification Process

Before the verification visit the Verifier should:

1. Check they have all necessary documentation and paperwork (see above)
2. Arrange the schedule of visits with the centre
3. Set objectives for the verification visits
4. Send the **Confirmation of Verification Visit Arrangements form** to the centre and copy to OCNSWR
5. Familiarise themselves with the contents of the approved course documentation and units and last verification report, if appropriate

During the verification visit, the Verifier should:

1. Use all information, materials, and opportunities set out on the **Confirmation of Verification Visit Arrangements form** to meet the objectives of the verification visit
2. Take advantage of the visit to meet members of the course team and learners if possible, and to look at resources and learner support
3. Review the sample of work including completed assignments, each available credit level, any Accreditation of Prior (Experiential) Learning (AP(E)L) evidence and borderline work from all assessors
4. Check that all portfolios include a statement of authenticity
5. Check that the course is being delivered as stated in the approved course documentation
6. Check that assessment is being carried out consistently and that assessment has been pre-planned
7. Discuss possible or necessary course changes/revisions with the assessor/manager, and include any recommendations in their report for action by OCNSWR
8. Complete the copy RAC to record sampling undertaken
9. Sign the top sheet of any Recommendation for the Award of Credit Forms (RACs)

The RAC is an auditable document and, if it is not signed or if changes are not initialled by the Verifier, the RAC will have to be returned to the centre by OCNSWR, delaying award of credit to learners. OCNSWR's preferred option is that the respective Customer Support Officer is informed of amendments and a new RAC is produced and forwarded to centre for completion

10. Seal any completed RACs with the signed top sheet and leave with the nominated contact specified by OCN.

If the nominated contact is not available, signed RACs must be posted to OCNSWR by the Verifier.

11. Keep a copy of any initialled changes to RACs in case of dispute.

After the verification visit, the Verifier should:

1. Send Verification Reports and any supporting documentation to OCNSWR within 10 working days of the visit.



External Verifier sampling guidelines

OCNSWR takes a risk assessment based view of sampling and asks External Verifiers to make professional judgements about the size of the sample they wish to see at any individual visit.

However, please ensure that any sample selected always meets the requirements listed below:

- There is sufficient evidence available to satisfy you that the learning outcomes have been achieved.
- Assessment criteria at different levels are being applied consistently.
- All tutors/assessors on all sites are applying assessment criteria appropriately and consistently.
- Assessment criteria are interpreted consistently in all borderline, APL and work-based cases.
- Assessment methods are inclusive and are applied appropriately and consistently.
- Evidence is authentic.

The assessed work verified must be sufficient to provide a representative sample of provision and should include:

- Examples of work assessed by all tutors/assessors.
- Examples of all methods of assessment.
- Examples of all levels delivered.
- Work which has been internally verified.
- Borderline, AP(E)L or work-based evidence.

Verifiers should seek to vary the sample they request e.g. every 6th name, first 3 learners in each group, 1 learning outcome in all portfolios etc.

When selecting a sample, verifiers may choose a light touch where there is prior evidence of good practice and clear continuity. Where weaknesses have been identified in the past, verifiers should focus their attention on these particular areas.

As a general guide to the number of portfolios sampled, there is no specific percentage currently required, but it is expected that the sample will normally fall within 10 – 20%. Where there are six or fewer, all portfolios should be sampled.



Dealing with difficult situations

Avoiding problems before they arise

- 1 Arrange visits with your own health and safety in mind at all times.
- 2 Ensure your requirements for date, time, sample, personnel and accommodation are understood and agreed by email in advance of the visit.
- 3 Confirm arrangements by email at least 2 days before the visit.
- 4 Do not remove original learner work from the Centre or arrange for it to be sent to you.
- 5 If anything needs to be sent to you, arrange for this to be done electronically. If this is not possible, consult the OCNSWR Director of Quality (DQ) before making alternative arrangements.

What to do in difficult situations during a verification meeting

- 1 **You know that you will be alone with the person you are meeting**
Try to arrange the meeting where others will be around.
Make sure that someone at the OCN knows the details of the meeting, call that person when you arrive and when you leave.
- 2 **No-one is expecting you / no-one is there when you arrive**
Check with the Centre Reception whether someone can be there within 30 minutes. If so carry on with the visit.
After 30 minutes, leave a message for the person concerned, explaining that OCNSWR will make a charge for an additional visit and leave.
- 3 **The required sample is not available**
Check whether the required sample or an acceptable equivalent can be gathered within 30 minutes, if so continue.
If not, explain need for required sample, cost of extra visit and leave.
- 4 **Some of the required people are not available**
Explain the need to see the people concerned at the next verification visit or the possible need for an extra visit. Continue with the rest of the verification activities if possible.
- 5 **Tutor/Internal Verifier disagrees with Verification decisions**
Explain the reasons for your decisions to try to reach agreement.
If there is still no agreement, explain the OCNSWR procedure for Appeals against Verification Decisions.
- 6 **Centre Staff complain about the OCN**
Listen to the complaint and make notes.
Explain that you will forward the complaint to the Director of Quality.
Do not attempt to either defend the OCN or agree with the complaint – remain neutral.
- 7 **You feel threatened in any way during the meeting**
As soon as you begin to feel at all uncomfortable, make your excuses and leave.
- 8 **You are offered anything that you consider to be an incentive/bribe**
Politely refuse, saying you are not allowed to accept gifts.
- 9 **The Centre has not allocated sufficient space for you to carry out your duties**
Request a different room/space. If this cannot be provided within 30 minutes, carry out any parts of the visit which are possible. Explain the need for an extra visit at extra cost to complete verification activities and leave.



Internal Verification

A NOCN Recognised Centre must have in place an Internal Verification process, which ensures the following:

1. Assessment is appropriate, consistent, fair and transparent.
2. Tutors/assessors receive ongoing advice and support, for example on designing assessment activities.
3. Learners are clear about assessment requirements and are given opportunities to achieve against the assessment criteria.
4. Learners' work is presented in a manner which supports the verification process.
5. Evidence of learner achievement is mapped to the assessment criteria.
6. Award of credit is valid, reliable and consistent.

Definition of Internal Verification

Internal verification can be defined as:

'a process undertaken by a providing organisation in which assessment practices and decisions are regularly sampled and evaluated and findings are acted upon to ensure consistency and fairness'.

Therefore Internal Verification involves two processes: verification and standardisation.

The Role of the Internal Verifier

The role of the Internal Verifier is to ensure that:

- a) Assessment is appropriate, consistent, fair, transparent and does not unintentionally discriminate against candidates with disabilities.
- b) Tutors/assessors receive ongoing advice and support, for example, on designing assessment activities.
- c) Learners are clear about assessment requirements and are given opportunities to achieve against the assessment criteria.
- d) Learners' work is presented in a manner that supports the verification process.
- e) Evidence of learner achievement is mapped to the assessment criteria.
- f) Award of credit is valid, reliable and consistent.

Once all the above are in place, credit can be awarded. Internal Verifiers, who meet the specified criteria, will be approved by the NOCN Quality Reviewer (QR) as authorized signatories of the Recommendation for Award of Credit (RAC) forms. The External Verifier must sign the RAC where there is no Internal Verifier authorised to sign.

Minimum criteria for Internal Verifiers authorised to sign for the Award of Credit

Internal Verifiers in a Centre may be approved to sign the Recommendations for Award of Credit. The QR will monitor this approval annually.

An Approved Internal Verifier must:

1. Have experience of N/OCN assessment and quality systems through acting as an Internal Verifier or External Verifier or Assessor on OCN programmes.
2. Have attended an N/OCN approved training event on quality systems.



3. Demonstrate a commitment to on-going professional development; it is desirable that wherever possible, authorised Internal Verifiers achieve the OCN Internal Verification Award within three years of Centre Recognition.

Please note:-

From 1 September 2008, all internal verifiers seeking approval to sign off the award of credit must hold a recognised verifier qualification and have attended OCNSWR contextualisation training if the qualification is not awarded by NOCN

Qualifications currently recognised are:-

- **NOCN Internal Verifier Award**
- **NOCN External Verifier Award**
- **V1**
- **V2**
- **D34**
- **D35**



The Practice of Internal Verification

The following activities must take place to underpin the internal verification process:

Planning for Internal Verification

A plan of internal verification activity must be developed indicating

- What will happen
- When it will happen
- Who will be involved

Induction of new tutors/assessors

New tutors/assessors must:

- a) Be supplied with the units and assessment materials.
- b) Clearly understand assessment requirements and procedures.
- c) Have information about accessing OCN training opportunities and support materials.

It is also recommended that all assignment briefs are internally verified before delivery

Update for all tutors/assessors

All tutors/assessors must:

- a) Know the name of the person who will manage the Internal Verification process and the name of the Internal Verifier
- b) Know how internal verification will happen, when it will happen and who will be involved.
- c) Be informed about issues raised through previous internal and external verification activity.

On-course monitoring

The internal verifier/s should:

- a) Sample assessment to ensure:
 - Feedback to learners is clear and constructive
 - Assessment activities are standard and appropriate
 - Assessment decisions are fair and consistent
 - Assessment records are clear
- b) Undertake standardisation activities
- c) Ensure learners understand assessment requirements
- d) Provide advice and support for tutors/assessors and share good practice
- e) Identify good assessment practice
- f) Record internal verification activities and findings, list action points and report to tutors/assessors and the External Verifier/Quality Reviewer

End of course checking

The Internal Verifier/s should:

- a) Monitor progress against previous action points.
- b) Ensure assessment records are complete and accurate.
- c) Ensure evidence of achievement is appropriate, standardised and mapped to the assessment criteria.
- d) Check that the Recommendation for the Award of Credit form (RAC) is complete and accurate.
- e) Record internal verification activities and findings, list action points, and report to tutors/assessors and the External Verifier/Quality Reviewer.
- f) Sign off learners using the Recommendation for Award of Credit forms, if authorised.



Guidance on Internal Verification Sampling and Record Keeping

What do Internal Verifiers sample and why?

Internal Verifiers are responsible for monitoring the quality of assessment, hence the need for them to sample assessment practices and decisions. It is not usually possible or necessary to internally verify every aspect of assessment at each internal verification event. A properly selected representative sample should identify any issues with assessment practices and decisions.

Selecting a sample

To select a representative sample, Internal Verifiers must take account of different factors, which may impact on the quality of assessment. These factors are used to define a sampling strategy. The sampling strategy determines the size of the sample and enables value judgements to be made.

The key factors to consider are:

- New provision/new tutor/assessor/s
- Sites of delivery
- Number of tutors/assessors
- Number of units
- Delivery method
- Previous internal verification recommendations
- Assessment methods
- Special arrangements
- External Verifier's recommendations
- Borderline cases
- Unit level
- Credit value.

The sample must include an element of random selection by the Internal Verifier. It is not necessary to sample across every aspect of the programme at each event but everything must be covered over a period of time, for example, a year. Internal Verifiers should plan their sampling strategy in advance and make this information available to the External Verifier.

Using the selected sample

Internal Verifiers should check the selected sample in three ways:

1. By checking all the assessment for a given learner to ensure that assessment is appropriate, consistent and complete.
2. By checking specific learning outcomes across a number of learners to ensure that assessment is consistent for all learners.
3. By checking level and credit value to establish that standards are maintained across units, modules, tutors, sites, and over time.

Samples of work may be requested from Centres for use in regional and national standardisation events.

Record Keeping

It is important that detailed records of internal verification are kept to demonstrate that the internal verification procedures have been carried out, and to provide written feedback to tutors.



Which records should be kept?

Internal Verifiers should record two sets of information:

1. The sample planned and taken by the Internal Verifier, usually in the form of a matrix
2. The comments and feedback to the tutor following the sampling exercise, showing any action required and how this was resolved.

The format for the recording forms can vary, but OCNSWR encourages the use of standard NOCN documentation as provided in the NOCN Centre Handbook.

NOCN IV template forms consist of:-

Internal Verifier Feedback to Assessor
Internal Verification Report on Single Learner Portfolio
Internal Verification Sample Record
Internal Verification Sampling Assessment Decisions



Standardisation

Standardisation events, both regional and national, will be held as required by OCNSWR and NOCN

Appeals against the Outcome of Subject Verification

If any centre staff disagree with the outcome or conduct of subject verification, any concerns should be raised in the first instance with the External Verifier concerned. If agreement cannot be reached, the issue should be raised with the OCNSWR Director of Quality who will investigate whether it can be resolved without instigating the formal Appeals Procedure. If the matter cannot be resolved, the following procedure will be adopted:

- 1 If the Centre is dissatisfied with the outcome or conduct of Subject Verification, an appeal should be made, in writing, to the OCNSWR Regional Director who will consult with the Chair of the OCNSWR Board.
- 2 The Chair will request a written response to the appeal from the External Verifier.
- 3 The appeal will be heard by the Chair of the Board, the OCNSWR Regional Director, a centre representative and an independent OCNSWR Verifier.
- 4 The appeal will be heard as soon as possible. The appellant and the Verifier and any representatives invited by the OCNSWR Board will present their case and answer questions.
- 5 The matter will then be referred to the Board whose decision is final.

