



DSW CENTRE ASSESSMENT STANDARDS SCRUTINY (CASS) STRATEGY OVERVIEW

PURPOSE AND BENEFIT

This document sets out DSW's overarching approach to Centre Assessment Standards Scrutiny (CASS) for any Ofqual-regulated qualification where assessment activity is undertaken by an approved Centre, including apprenticeship assessments and other regulated qualifications containing centre assessment components.

The purpose of CASS is to ensure that assessment decisions made by Centres are valid, reliable, fair, and consistent, irrespective of delivery model, learner cohort, or assessment location. Through a proportionate but risk-based quality assurance framework, DSW seeks to provide confidence to learners, employers, Centres, regulators, and other stakeholders that assessment outcomes are robust, defensible, and aligned to qualification and regulatory requirements.

CASS supports:

- Consistency of marking and grading across Centres and qualifications
- Effective management of assessment risk and prevention of incorrect marking
- Protection of learner interests through fair and equitable assessment practice
- Clear accountability between DSW and approved Centres
- Continuous improvement through monitoring, review, and feedback.

This document provides a summary of DSW's public approach only. More detailed operational requirements and qualification-specific arrangements are made available to approved Centres separately.

BACKGROUND

Where DSW permits Centre assessment activity, DSW remains fully accountable for the quality and integrity of assessment delivery and outcomes. Approval to assess does not transfer awarding organisation responsibilities to the Centre.

Centres must demonstrate that they have suitably qualified personnel, appropriate governance arrangements, effective internal quality assurance arrangements, and compliant operational policies to support assessment delivery. All assessment activity must align with published qualification requirements, assessment materials, marking guidance and relevant DSW policies.

DSW applies a risk-based approach to the approval, monitoring, and review of Centres undertaking assessment activity. This includes ongoing oversight of centre performance, assessment quality, and any qualification-specific risks associated with centre-delivered assessment.

CENTRE APPROVAL AND ONBOARDING

Centres are approved through a formal recognition process which evaluates their ability to deliver valid, reliable and consistent assessment outcomes.

As part of approval, centres must demonstrate:

- Effective governance and oversight arrangements for assessment delivery
- Adequate staffing structures with appropriately qualified and competent personnel
- Robust internal quality assurance systems
- Comprehensive organisational policies and procedures, including (but not limited to):
 - Conflict of Interest
 - Internal Quality Assurance
 - Artificial Intelligence Use
 - Malpractice and Maladministration
 - Complaints and Appeals
 - Safeguarding (where applicable)
 - Data Protection and information governance
 - Staff competence and continuing professional development

Centre policies remain the responsibility of the centre but are subject to approval, monitoring, and periodic review by DSW to ensure ongoing alignment with expected standards and regulatory requirements.

The exception to this arrangement is **Reasonable Adjustments and Special Considerations**, where centres must fully adopt and apply DSW's policy to ensure consistency, fairness, and equitable treatment for all learners.

Following approval, centres enter an onboarding phase during which DSW provides access to the tools, resources, and materials required to support effective delivery and standardisation. This includes, where relevant:

- Access to qualification guidance, assessment materials, and supporting documentation
- Standardisation resources and examples of good assessment practice
- Training and support for delivery, assessment and quality assurance staff
- Systems guidance and operational support
- Ongoing updates, communications, and sector information

QUALITY ASSURANCE

EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE

DSW is responsible for external quality assurance of Centre assessment delivery. This includes review of Centre processes, sampling of assessment decisions, review of internal quality assurance effectiveness, and monitoring of compliance against DSW requirements.

DSW applies a structured external quality assurance approach that includes the sampling of centre assessment decisions for each qualification. This covers both early stages of delivery and ongoing business-as-usual activity. Sampling activity, along with wider external quality

assurance measures, is applied using a risk-based approach and may be increased or reduced depending on centre performance, historical outcomes, and emerging intelligence.

This ensures that external scrutiny is proportionate, targeted, and responsive, while maintaining confidence in the consistency and validity of assessment decisions across all centres.

The framework is underpinned by the following principles:

- Validity of assessment decisions
- Consistency and reliability across centres
- Fairness and accessibility for all learners
- Risk-based and proportionate external scrutiny
- Clear separation between centre delivery responsibility and DSW oversight.

This approach ensures that CASS remains flexible, responsive to risk, and aligned to evolving regulatory expectations and best practice in assessment quality assurance.

SAMPLING AND MONITORING

DSW applies a risk-based external quality assurance approach. Sampling and monitoring activity may include:

- Review of assessment decisions across grades and outcomes, including unsuccessful outcomes where appropriate
- Review of assessor and IQA decisions
- Review of centre policies, records, and operational controls
- Observation, remote review, or site-based quality assurance activity.

Sampling levels and monitoring intensity are determined according to factors such as Centre maturity, delivery volume, qualification risk, previous findings, complaints, appeals, malpractice concerns, and trends in assessment outcomes.

Where elevated risk is identified, DSW may apply enhanced monitoring arrangements, including increased sampling, targeted reviews, additional observations, or short notice / unannounced quality assurance activity.

Centres must be able to demonstrate accurate and consistent assessment decisions over a sustained period before DSW permits routine release of results under agreed arrangements.

CENTRE PERSONNEL

Centres are expected to ensure assessors and IQAs are occupationally competent, appropriately experienced and sufficiently trained to undertake their responsibilities. This should include relevant qualifications, current subject expertise and ongoing CPD where appropriate.

INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE

Centres are required to maintain an effective Internal Quality Assurance (IQA) function responsible for monitoring, sampling, and confirming the consistency and validity of assessment decisions.

Centres must appoint suitably qualified IQA personnel, including a Lead IQA who acts as the primary point of contact with DSW.

IQAs are expected to hold an appropriate IQA qualification at Level 4 or equivalent. Where individuals are working towards this standard, their decisions must be countersigned by a qualified IQA.

ASSESSORS

Centres are responsible for ensuring that assessors are competent, current, and appropriately qualified for the subject or occupational area being assessed.

In determining assessor suitability, centres should consider:

- Relevant subject or sector expertise
- Recent and relevant occupational experience
- Continuing professional development
- Teaching, training or assessment qualifications (where appropriate)
- Professional body membership or recognition
- Other mandatory requirements set out by relevant industry bodies.

DSW provides guidance and expectations but maintains that centres retain responsibility for final appointment decisions, subject to approval and ongoing scrutiny.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

Centres are expected to identify, manage, record, and review actual, potential, and perceived conflicts of interest associated with assessment delivery.

Where Centres assess their own learners, robust controls must be in place to preserve independence, objectivity, and fairness. Such controls may include role separation, additional internal review, escalation arrangements, enhanced sampling, and transparent documentation of mitigation measures.

Centres must maintain appropriate records and make them available to DSW upon request.

DSW retains the right to review and challenge arrangements where potential conflicts may compromise assessment validity.