

What is Quality Assurance?

Each year, the staff at ASDAN Central Office deal with the processing of submissions that will provide literally thousands of ASDAN candidates with their certificates. In the case of schools, students will take these certificates with them as they leave to continue their further or higher education or they will present them to employers or training providers as evidence of their personal achievements.

Whilst submissions are received all year round, it is the summer term when the largest influx of candidate registrations are received, and staff deal as efficiently as possible with the huge increase in demand from centres for external moderation, the processing of results and the gathering and submission of related candidate achievement data to the relevant authorities by the required date.

All Awarding Organisations have systems, procedures and paperwork, which not only facilitate the administrative processes involved and give centres the best possible opportunity for their candidates to achieve success through the moderation process, but also safeguard the quality assurance which underpins the value of the qualifications awarded.

These QA systems necessarily include time limits and deadlines within which centres and staff have to operate if obligations to all parties are to be met, and which, if not adhered to, could undermine the value of the qualifications for all centres and candidates across the whole country. This sounds dramatic, but it is surprising the number of requests ASDAN staff receive from centres every year to disregard QA procedures and make an “exception to the rules”, perhaps not realising the impact that this would have, not only on the ability of administrative staff to physically deal with large numbers of anomalies and special requests, but on the validity of the centre’s submission.

Every registered centre has access to a wide range of sources of information with which they need to be familiar, regarding the administrative and quality assurance requirements for the particular qualification in which they are involved, ranging from the written information within the Centre Guidance document, the ASDAN bulletin and website, to verbal support and advice disseminated at workshops and other training events, Central Office customer service support and from their external moderator or a member of the regional team.

Despite this wealth of information, the most common request from centre co-ordinators is for a change to the sample of portfolios identified as being representative of their centre’s work, after the deadline for submissions has passed. Below is a summary of the processes involved to help to illustrate how important it is to maintain QA standards by adhering to set procedures.

Internal moderation

The first stage of moderation - internal moderation - is intended to ensure that the standard of portfolios submitted by a centre is consistent, however many different teachers/tutors/assessors have been involved in the delivery and assessment of candidates’ work. The internal moderator should compare the decisions made by each assessor and discuss, agree and adjust them where necessary in order to ensure that they are reliable and consistent. In other words there should be one consistent standard of assessment for the centre as a whole. When submitting the list of candidates to ASDAN for external moderation, the centre signs a declaration stating that all candidates’ work has been internally moderated and judged to have met the required standards.

External moderation

The second stage of moderation - external moderation - is intended to establish consistency across all the centres entering candidates for a particular qualification, and it is vital to the quality

What is Quality Assurance?

assurance strategy that this is rigorous. External moderation is carried out by moderators with relevant teaching and assessment experience, appointed by ASDAN. The moderators are trained by ASDAN to follow the appropriate procedures and to apply the correct standards. Their work is supervised by a principal moderator or team leader. The role of the external moderator is to ensure that:

- The qualification operates according to the internal processes agreed in the Centre Approval checklist
- All processes leading to certification pay due regard to fairness and equity
- The evidence of achievement is appropriate and sufficient
- The internal moderation system operating within the centre ensures that assessment judgements are valid and consistent

In addition to these core functions the external moderator, through this process, will:

- Provide for overall consistency in the certification of all ASDAN candidates
- Advise centres on good practice and encourage them to continuously develop and improve the quality of their delivery

Sampling portfolios

Moderation is normally carried out by sampling work from each centre. If the number of candidates is very small, all the work may be reviewed by the moderator. For larger submissions however, a sample is chosen to represent the whole range of units, levels and assessors for the centre concerned. The moderator then reviews the sample of work using the specified assessment criteria in order to establish whether or not the original assessment is in line with the agreed standard for the qualification as a whole.

The criteria for entering a candidate for external moderation are:

- The candidate's evidence is complete for each unit being entered for external moderation
- The evidence has been internally assessed and confirmed as meeting the requirements
- The decisions of the assessors have been confirmed as accurate through the centre's internal moderation process
- Any action identified by the internal moderator has been completed

Centres ringing Central Office to tell us that they wish to withdraw candidates because their portfolios are not complete, or not available, or to add new candidates to the list, are thereby potentially compromising the QA of the whole moderation process. ASDAN monitors such requests from centres, and reserves the right to reject moderation submissions if it is felt appropriate. A fee may also be levied where relevant.

It is vital for all ASDAN centres and their candidates that we safeguard our QA procedures. Whilst we pride ourselves on our reputation for flexibility, our willingness to help and support centres and our excellent customer service, we cannot allow these attributes to compromise our equally high standard of QA nor to undermine our status as an Awarding Organisation for qualifications such as CoPE, PSD, Wider Key Skills and Employability amongst others, that are so highly valued by our centres.