



Report on the monitoring of
**Open College Network Northern
Ireland (OCN NI)**

Dec 2019

Open College Network Northern Ireland

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About this report

CCEA Regulation acts on behalf of the Department of Education (DE) and the Department for the Economy (DfE) to regulate the qualifications offered to learners in Northern Ireland. These functions are enabled by the Education (NI) Order 1998. The scope of CCEA Regulation was extended to cover all qualifications in Northern Ireland from May 2016.

CCEA Regulation undertakes a range of assurance activities to ascertain compliance, or otherwise, with CCEA General Conditions of Recognition 2019 (GCoR). These activities are proportionate to the level of risk perceived to be associated with any awarding organisation, an individual qualification or a group of qualifications.

This report is the outcome of monitoring activity on the Open College Network Northern Ireland (OCN NI) that CCEA Regulation carried out between August and October 2019.

Monitoring activities included:

- desktop review of documentation already held by CCEA Regulation, the OCN NI website and documentation provided by OCN NI on request;
- desktop review of a sample of qualification-specific material (specifications, syllabi and example tests);
- a visit to OCN NI offices to conduct interviews with staff; and
- visits to four centres in Northern Ireland offering OCN NI qualifications.

The report draws together CCEA Regulation's findings against the following CCEA General Conditions of Recognition April 2019:

Section A Governance

- Condition A1** – Suitability for continuing recognition
- Condition A5** – Availability of adequate resources and arrangements
- Condition A6** – Identification and management of risks

Section C: Third parties

- Condition C2** – Arrangements with Centres

Section D: General requirements for regulated qualifications

- Condition D8** – Making available information to help meet teachers' needs

Section G: Setting and delivering the assessment

- Condition G1** – Setting the assessment
- Condition G8** – Completion of the assessment under the required conditions
- Condition G9** – Delivering the assessment

Section H: From marking to issuing results

- Condition H1** – Marking the assessment
- Condition H2** – Moderation where an assessment is marked by a centre
- Condition H3** – Monitoring the specified levels of attainment for a qualification

No instances of non-compliance were discovered. Observations are specified at the end of each section of this report. OCN NI may respond to observations or include an action plan for responding to these.

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About OCN NI

OCN NI is the fourth largest awarding organisation in Northern Ireland in 2018–19 by award of certificates. It is a UK recognised awarding organisation based in Northern Ireland. CCEA Regulation regulates it to develop and award professional and technical (vocational) qualifications from Entry Level up to and including Level 5 across all sector areas. OCN NI is also regulated by Ofqual to award similar qualifications in England.

OCN NI is an educational charity and an awarding organisation. It advances

education by developing nationally recognised qualifications and recognising the achievements of adults and young people. It works with further education colleges, private training organisations, voluntary and community organisations, schools, SMEs and public sector bodies to give learners opportunities to progress into further learning and/or employment.



A

GCoR Section A: Governance

Condition A1 Suitability for continuing recognition

- The awarding organisation is an independent, self-financing charitable organisation with a board made up of eleven directors, with two sub-committees: Finance and General Purpose, and Regulation and Quality. Directors have experience of working in a variety of education sectors and bring a range of expertise from leadership and management. It is unclear what specific finance expertise is included in the board of directors.
- Minutes of regular meetings show effective discussions and actions of governance issues, including evidence of completed actions.
- Continuing Professional Development (CPD) for directors is reviewed periodically and appropriate training provided. All directors participate in an annual appraisal process.
- A strategic plan for 2019–22 includes ten main areas of qualification focus, as opposed to five in the previous strategic plan. This demonstrates a doubling in the main areas of interest for qualifications development.

Condition A5 Availability of adequate resources and arrangements

Findings

- The awarding organisation has twenty permanent staff, structured into three senior manager-led departments. There is a stable workforce of long-serving employees with positive working relationships. Staff interviewed appreciated support for their job roles from the CEO and senior management.
- OCN NI has almost doubled the number of awards made over the last four years with 54,095 registrations and 20,364 qualifications awards in 2018–19. To support this growth, a revised organisational chart reflects some planned additional staffing to complement the existing team.
- Additional financial resources were to be included in the development plan for the next three years to sustain the growth of the organisation and provide additional resources to support centres with delivery and assessment. Specific additional resources have been allocated to delivering Essential Skills qualifications for the next three years. There are currently 241 active centres, including further education colleges, schools, private training providers, prisons, health trusts, community and voluntary organisations, employers and government bodies.
- Centres have access to over 500 qualifications (OCN NI and National Open College Network (NOCN)) ranging from Entry Level up to and including Level 5. Entry Level or Level

1 makes up 39 percent of these qualifications, with further education and schools representing the two largest sectors of provision.

- Seventy associates are contracted to support qualification development and quality assurance of assessment. Most of these associates come from education and training, and a large number from further education. It is not evident how OCN NI ensures up-to-date CPD of the occupational or subject-specific expertise of these associates. External Quality Assessors (EQA) visiting centres do not always have occupational expertise.
- Most assessments used in qualifications are centre-devised. Extensive face-to-face training sessions are scheduled. Centres can also access online training resources. Centres indicated that the majority of their staff had attended training that OCN NI provided at either OCN NI or bespoke centre sessions. The new centre training session that CCEA Regulation attended was limited in scope and scale to 40 minutes and did not address some key assessment operational aspects. Compliance and audit processes are in place to support the quality assurance of these assessments.
- A process for qualification development that uses vocational experts mostly from further education backgrounds is in place. However, this doesn't account for the inclusion of international practices in the relevant area. Centres indicated their appreciation of the facility to develop qualifications that reflected local requirements and demand.

Condition A6 Identification and management of risks

Findings

- OCN NI operates a risk averse policy, reflected in their publication *Outlining our Approach to Risk* – OCN NI's risk management of centres. OCN NI manages, maintains and updates its risks register electronically.
- Risk is a standing item on the agenda of internal meetings, including the senior management, compliance and audit, qualifications development and corporate services teams, and in board and committee meetings.
- There is a Contingency Plan incorporating Brexit planning.
- A large number of centres have issued fewer than ten certificates annually. OCN NI does not regard sustainability of low-income centres as a risk, as this is part of their charitable status ethos.
- The 2017–18 annual customer service survey resulted in 100 percent of respondents agreeing that OCN NI offers good to excellent customer service. Visits to new and established centres confirmed this, where there was an appreciation of the responsiveness and flexibility of support that OCN NI provides.
- Business Development Advisors (BDAs) are involved in all aspects of the customer journey: from centre approval through to quality processes, providing advice and guidance on operational issues as well as technical sector-specific qualification or assessment

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queries. Currently three BDAs are employed, each with a large portfolio of centre contacts to manage. Centres confirmed that responsive support was available through the BDAs.

Non-compliances

There are no observed non-compliances.

Observations

OCN NI may consider:

identifying or resourcing specific expertise in finance for the governing body membership;

putting further planning in place to resource the current doubling of the scope and scale of awarding;

strengthening EQA resources by ensuring expertise is available for centre visits across the qualifications portfolio;

strengthening qualifications development by including international industry developments; and

reviewing new centre training sessions for suitability of scope and scale of content.



C

Findings Section C: Third parties

Condition C2 Arrangements with Centres

Findings

Centre recognition is a comprehensive and rigorous process. Face-to-face and telephone guidance is provided throughout the process.

Centres are required to provide evidence that appropriate resources are available to ensure sustainability and delivery of qualifications – these are monitored as part of standard quality procedure.

Internal Verification (IV) training is mandatory. The training session witnessed was comprehensive. Assessment training is optional. It is encouraged where issues in assessment are identified through quality assurance checking. Records of centre staff attending training are maintained. Bespoke or individual centre training is also offered. Some of the centre staff interviewed had attended assessment training at OCN NI. Some training was provided on centre premises. Comments about centre assessment are available below for Condition A5.

The majority of staff in centres had attended IV training and/or assessment training provided by OCN NI.

The level or quantity of centre contact is proportional to the centre size.

Centres approach OCN NI to develop qualifications to meet specific need. OCN NI considers applications, which are supported by a business case, against set criteria. Centres indicated their appreciation of this facility.

Third party logos appear on certificates where OCN NI quality assures qualifications.

Non-compliances

There are no observed non-compliances.

Observations

There are no observations.

D

Findings Section D: General requirements for regulated qualifications

Condition D8 Making available information to help meet teachers' needs

Findings

- OCN NI provides 279 qualifications from Entry Level up to and including Level 5. Resource packs are available on a secure login platform for some qualifications, for example Tutor Answer Book, Tutor Guide and Learner Assessment Booklet. These packs provide assessment tools and resources for centres, but not assessment guidance. Centres would welcome further bespoke or qualification-specific assessment guidance resources.
- Schemes of work or lesson plans are provided for some qualifications.
- 286 centre staff received assessment training, 395 IV training and 452 blended training during 2018–19. Most of the training is free of charge. Centres confirmed that on-site training has also been provided.
- A comprehensive Centre Handbook is available.

Non-compliances

There are no observed non-compliances.

Observations

OCN NI could consider developing further bespoke or qualification-specific assessment guidance.

G

Findings Section G: Setting and delivering the assessment

Condition G1 Setting the assessment

Findings

- Each specification includes generic guidance for centres on the range of assessment methods available at unit level. Assessment guidance is integral to the qualification development process in the context of each unit.
- OCN NI has an experienced team that works on assessment design.
- An Assessment Definitions document is available for centres.
- Training is provided for centre-devised assessments through assessment training sessions, and advice given through external quality assurance visits.
- Centres indicated that there was limited opportunity to meet with other centres delivering sector-specific OCN NI qualifications. Centres would welcome the opportunity to share good practice.

Condition G8 Completion of the assessment under required conditions

Findings

- OCN NI EQAs monitor the assessment process, including under required

conditions. There is a standard template to produce an EQA report for each visit. This quality assurance model is revised periodically, most recently in 2018.

- Quality assurance is prioritised on a centre risk basis. High-risk centres are prioritised with mitigating measures in place through enhanced visits and training.
- Unannounced or short notice visits are scheduled proportionate to activity and risk rating. No centre visited had received an unannounced visit.
- A Reasonable Adjustment and Special Consideration Policy is provided to support centres.
- Direct claim status policy is available to support centres. It is not available for Level 5 qualifications.
- Centre-devised assessment, learner portfolios and coursework are monitored through OCN NI's Compliance and Audit processes.
- Lead Verifiers are being introduced as part of the strategic planning to mitigate risk associated with the substantial growth to date and predicted future increase.
- Invigilator training provided.

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Condition G9 Delivering the assessment

Findings

- Unit layout in qualification specifications is currently under review. This may lead to more assessment guidance being included in the unit layout, but OCN NI is conscious that a range of assessment methods need to be available to meet the needs of a diverse range of learners.
- OCN NI has a number of quality checks in place to ensure assessments are delivered consistently across centres and sectors. These include standardisation provided during assessment training, EQA processes and feedback, and bespoke training and support for designated centres that may come out of risk assessment. Centres would welcome subject or qualification-specific standardisation meetings with other practitioners. This would be especially welcome where centres have individual subject practitioners.

- There is a plan to introduce webinars to support centre staff delivering assessments.
- OCN NI operates a 360° approach to risk management for centres across the organisation.

Non-compliances

There are no observed non-compliances.

Observations

OCN NI could consider developing subject-specific standardisation meetings, allowing centre practitioners to come together and providing further support for delivery of assessment.

H

Findings GCoR Section H: From marking to issuing results

Condition H1 Marking the assessment

Findings

- Centre assessment and IV plans are required from all centres at qualifications approval stage.
- A reasonable adjustment policy is in place to guide centres.
- All reasonable adjustments are recorded and monitored at the EQA visit.

Condition H2 Moderation where an assessment is marked by a centre

Findings

- OCN NI is currently introducing Lead Verifiers who will act to strengthen the quality assurance processes and standardisation of EQA practice.
- All EQAs attend induction sessions.
- All EQA reports are risk rated. The Compliance and Audit Manager records and monitors actions. The IT system will flag risk.
- Standardisation sessions are provided at centre level and at EQA level.
- An appraisal system is in place for all EQAs. It identifies CPD needs.
- Quality Review Forums are in place.

Condition H3 Monitoring the specified levels of attainment for a qualification

Findings

- Lead verifier report includes monitoring the levels of attainment over time, and OCN NI monitor attainment against similar NOCN qualifications.

Non-compliances

There are no observed non-compliances.

Observations

There are no observations.