



Centre Handbook

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1. Introduction

Welcome to this centre handbook which has been designed to provide guidance for tutors, assessors and internal quality assurers on the assessment, internal quality assurance and external quality assurance requirements for Laser Learning Awards (LASER) regulated and unregulated qualifications offered by approved centres. It sets out the assessment and quality assurance responsibilities for centres and provides guidance on a range of assessment methods and activities.

To deliver regulated and unregulated qualifications, centres must show that they can meet LASER quality assurance requirements, demonstrating a robust system for internal quality assurance, including a named point of accountability for the quality assurance and management of the qualifications.

Certain qualifications require that centres have specialist resources, or that staff assessing or internally quality assuring the qualification have certain qualifications or experience. This information is detailed in the qualification specifications, which can be found on the LASER website: www.laser-awards.org.uk.

2. Assessor and Internal Quality Assurance Training

We offer a wide range of training and qualification courses for centre staff. These include training on assessment, internal quality assurance and bespoke training if required. Details can be found on the LASER website, where bookings can also be made. All training courses can be tailored to meet any specific needs, and can be delivered onsite exclusively for your centre staff at a venue of your choice if required.

3. Other Products and Services

LASER offers a range of products and services in addition to our Ofqual regulated qualifications and unregulated provision. Please see the LASER website for further information including:

- Developing regulated and unregulated qualifications.
- Quality Mark.
- Sixth Form Baccalaureate.
- Training.
- Consultancy and support services which can be tailored to meet individual needs.
- QAA regulated Access to Higher Education Diplomas.

4. Centre Recognition Agreement

The Centre Recognition Agreement is the legal contract made between your centre, and us the Awarding Organisation, LASER. It states the requirements to which your centre must commit in relation to training provision, quality and administration. The agreement sets out the terms and conditions for recognition of your centre and the obligations on your centre when using regulated and unregulated qualifications. Some of these terms and conditions are referred to in this centre handbook, however this does not replace the need to read and understand the agreement in full, as failure to comply with any aspect of the agreement may lead to the withdrawal of centre and/or individual approval by LASER.

5. Policies and Procedures

The Centre Recognition Agreement requires that your centre has in place required policies and procedures, to support your quality systems. It is the responsibility of your centre to develop policies and procedures that reflect your operating circumstances and extent of your qualification offer. The LASER website provides guidance on centre recognition and the policies and procedures required.

The policies which your centre must have and implement include (but are not limited to) an appropriate complaints policy and procedure, appeals policy and procedure, and malpractice policy and procedure, which are all made available to staff and learners (see sections 15, 16 and 17 below).

6. Qualification Approval

Once your centre has been approved, access to the LASER Quartz Web, our secure web portal for administration and guidance documents, will be arranged. Your centre can request approval to offer regulated and unregulated qualifications at any time. A New Course Form must be completed for each qualification you wish to offer prior to you commencing delivery of the course. New Course Forms can be downloaded from the web portal Documents web page.

Once completed, a New Course Form should be submitted to LASER by uploading to the Documents section of the secure web portal. Once the form has been submitted, the application will be considered and you will be contacted if we have any queries.

Your centre must ensure there are sufficient staff to be able to deliver the qualifications you wish to offer, including administration, teaching, assessing, internal quality assurance and management of the provision. Assessors and internal quality assurers should be occupationally competent and knowledgeable to be able to assess and quality assure appropriately. Your centre must also have appropriate facilities and resources for delivering and assessing the qualifications, for example classrooms, access to IT, teaching resources, etc.

7. Registering Learners

Once approval has been given for a qualification, your centre will be able to register learners against this qualification by completing the ERegistration spreadsheet and uploading this to ERegistration Submission section of the web portal.

Details of registration fees for unregulated and regulated qualifications can be found in the Products and Prices Catalogue available on the LASER website.

Learners must be registered as follows to avoid late fees:

- Within 25 working days from the start date for courses of 12 weeks or less.
- Within 60 working days from the start date for courses of more than 12 weeks.

Details of late fee charges can be found in the Products and Prices Catalogue available on the LASER website.

Your centre must have arrangements in place to obtain on behalf of learners a Unique Learner Number (ULN) and a learner record (unless the learner chooses not to have one).

8. Claiming Achievement

Your centre must claim each certificate or learner achievement correctly and in line with the requirements of LASER as stated in the Quartz Web User Guide available on the web portal for approved centres. This includes but is not limited to timing requirements.

Your centre must also take all reasonable steps to guard against fraudulent or mistaken registrations and/or claims for certificates or learner achievements.

9. Retention of Records

Your centre must retain complete and accurate relevant records securely for at least six years. Records may be kept electronically and/or in hard copy, provided in either case they are kept securely.

Relevant records may include (but are not limited to) assessment, internal quality assurance, certificate claims, learner attendance records, learner feedback forms, records of course runs, assessor and internal quality assurer CVs and qualifications.

10. Qualification Units

Each qualification is usually made up of units, which consist of learning outcomes and assessment criteria, which can be skills and/or knowledge based. In order to achieve the unit, each learner must provide evidence of meeting all of the assessment criteria.

11. Total Qualification Time (TQT) and Guided Learning

Total Qualification Time is the number of notional hours which represents an estimate of the total amount of time that could reasonably be expected to be required for a learner to achieve and demonstrate the achievement of the level of attainment necessary for the award of a qualification.

Total Qualification Time is comprised of the following two elements:

- (a) the number of hours which an awarding organisation has assigned to a qualification for Guided Learning, and
- (b) an estimate of the number of hours a learner will reasonably be likely to spend in preparation, study or any other form of participation in education or training, including assessment, which takes place as directed by – but, unlike Guided Learning, not under the immediate guidance or supervision of – a lecturer, supervisor, tutor or other appropriate provider of education or training.

12. Credit Values

Many LASER qualifications are assigned a credit value. Credit values are based on Total Qualification Time (TQT – see section 11 above) for the qualification, divided by 10. For example, a qualification with a TQT of 70 will have a credit value of 7 (70 divided by 10).

13. Assessment

In order to ensure that learners achieve the qualification(s) they are registered on, they must provide evidence that they have achieved all units specified in the rules of combination for that qualification. These are explained in the Qualification Specifications which contain full details of the qualification, including links to the units within the qualification, guidance on how to deliver and assess the qualification, any specific assessment requirements, and any other specialist information or requirements. They also include the review dates for the qualification and units.

Your centre must have in place delivery and assessment staff who have in-depth knowledge of the subject, and provide staff with access to appropriate training, support and guidance to underpin the provision of qualifications. Your centre will need to develop and implement a robust internal quality assurance system that is regularly reviewed and amended where necessary.

13a. Assessment Tasks and Activities

Where possible, LASER does not prescribe tasks and activities, giving centres flexibility in selecting the most appropriate methods for each cohort. Activities and tasks must be valid, fit for purpose, reliable, inclusive and set at the appropriate level, in line with TQT and credit value (see sections 11 and 12 above), giving learners the opportunity for all unit assessment criteria to be met. All tasks and activities must be cross reference to the unit assessment criteria and designed to allow all learners the opportunity to achieve, regardless of background.

Once suitable assessment tasks have been devised, they must be approved by your centre's internal quality assurer before being given to learners. The internal quality assurer will ensure that the tasks and activities

meet the principles of assessment, and that they allow learners to provide sufficient authentic evidence against all of the assessment criteria.

13b. Assessing Learner Work

Assessors must assess learner work against every unit assessment criteria and ensure the work is at the correct level and is sufficient, appropriate and authentic. This includes ensuring that learner evidence is generated by that learner and that plagiarism has not occurred.

Evidence of learner achievement could include portfolios, electronic and social platforms, journals, learner files, diaries, artwork, artefacts, annotated photographs, videos, and/or witness statements.

Formative assessments should be planned at various points throughout the course to establish how well each learner is progressing and to provide each learner with developmental feedback to help them improve.

Summative assessment should take place when the learner has completed all the tasks and activities set. Assessors should assess whether each assessment criteria has been achieved or not yet achieved, and provide final summative feedback to the learner.

A unit is only achieved when all assessment criteria in that unit have been achieved.

13c. Tracking Learner Achievement

Your centre must ensure that effective and secure systems are in place for recording and tracking learner achievement throughout the period of assessment.

All learner evidence must be:

- Mapped against the assessment criteria.
- Tracked against an individual learner in a structured format.
- Available to the Quality and Curriculum Reviewer at an agreed place and time.

Assessors must make it clear to the internal quality assurer and LASER Quality and Curriculum Reviewer where achievement of each unit assessment criteria has been evidenced.

LASER has created a number of Tutor/Assessor forms which are available on the LASER website, to help support assessors and internal quality assurers set up workable and coherent planning, tracking and recording system for learners' achievements. Forms which you might find useful include:

- TA01 Tutor Assessment Planning.
- TA02 Individual Learner Record for Unit Achievement.
- TA03 Tutor's Record of Learners' Assessment.

Tracking learners' progress, mapping their achievements and recording these for scrutiny by the internal and external quality assurer is an essential part of quality assurance. We can support your centre to make record keeping activities as easy and practical as possible, and to plan and integrate the documents into the whole learning, assessing and evidencing process.

13d. Recognition of Prior Learning and Credit Transfer

Recognition of prior learning (RPL) and transfer of credit exist to enable learners to avoid duplication of learning and assessment. Learners may claim RPL or transfer of credit against one whole unit or several units, but not partial units. The potential for a learner to undertake RPL or credit transfer relies on the course tutor or assessor carrying out effective interview and initial assessment to establish previous qualifications and experience. A maximum of 70% of a qualification can normally be achieved in this way. Centre funding may be affected if a learner achieves more than 50% of the assessment through RPL.

Recognition of prior learning allows for a learner to be recognised for learning they have previously undertaken which has not been certificated or accredited through the RQF (Regulated Qualification Framework) or QCF (Qualification and Credit Framework), towards the qualification being studied. The learner must provide evidence of prior work, learning or achievement. If approved for RPL, the learner does not need to attend learning for the approved unit(s), but must still undertake assessment in full in order to achieve the assessment criteria.

Credit transfer allows for previously accredited achievement from within the RQF or QCF to count towards another qualification, where it is allowed as an equivalency within the new qualification, or where the learner has already achieved unit(s) belonging to that qualification. In the case of approved credit transfer, the learner does not need to repeat their assessment. Eligibility should be checked by the internal quality assurer who should inform LASER. You need to:

- Provide evidence of qualifications/units achieved (not required where previous credit achievement was from LASER).
- Make an application for credit transfer to LASER.
- Identify approved credit transfers on the ERAC when achievement is being claimed.

Please note that where RPL or credit transfer is used towards a learner's achievement of a qualification, your centre will still be charged the full fee for the qualification being claimed, as the full qualification is still subject to external quality assurance by LASER, which includes checking eligibility for RPL/credit transfer.

13e. Reasonable Adjustments and Special Considerations

Reasonable adjustments and special considerations provide for arrangements to be made to take account of particular circumstances of individual learners, without giving unfair advantage over other learners.

A reasonable adjustment is an action which helps to reduce the effect of a disability or difficulty, such as dyslexia or a visual impairment, which places the learner at a substantial disadvantage in the assessment situation. Reasonable adjustments must not affect the reliability, validity, sufficiency or authenticity of the assessment outcomes, and the work produced by the learner will be assessed in the same way as the work of other learners. Factors such as the need to maintain competence have to be taken into consideration as well as considering what is reasonable in the individual circumstances. Your centre must always apply for and agree arrangements for reasonable adjustments with your LASER Quality and Curriculum Reviewer before the assessment activity takes place, by completing and submitting the Reasonable Adjustments Form which can be found on the LASER website. It is advised that reasonable adjustments are considered, and any applications made, as early as possible after the learner's registration onto their course.

Special consideration is given to a learner, or group of learners, who experience a temporary illness, injury, or other event outside of their control such as a fire alarm going off during an assessment, which has had or is reasonably likely to have had an effect on their ability to take an assessment or on their level of attainment in an assessment. Special consideration is not appropriate for a minor illness or a minor disturbance, and must not give the learner(s) an unfair advantage. A doctor's note will usually be required for applications relating to illness or injury. It may not be possible to apply special consideration where an assessment requires the learner to demonstrate practical competence, and in some circumstances it may be more appropriate to offer the learner an opportunity to take the assessment at a later date rather than apply for special consideration. To apply for special consideration, your centre must complete and submit the Special Considerations Form which can be found on the LASER website, as soon as is practically possible after the event has occurred.

Further guidance regarding reasonable adjustments and special considerations is contained within the LASER Access to Fair Assessment Policy and Procedure available on the LASER website.

13f. Potential Conflict of Interest

A potential conflict of interest is where an individual or organisation may have competing interests or loyalties. Potential conflicts of interest can arise in a variety of circumstances, and assessors and others may encounter potential conflicts of interest from time to time. Usually these can be managed, but they must always be reported, and your centre must take all reasonable steps to avoid any part of the assessment of a learner being undertaken by any person who has a personal interest in the result of the assessment. A failure to identify, manage and report a potential conflict of interest may subsequently invalidate an assessment.

If your centre considers a potential conflict of interest may occur, you must contact LASER immediately and request the Conflict of Interest Declaration form, which must be completed and returned to the LASER Quality Manager for discussion where necessary, and agreement.

14. Quality Assurance

All centres wishing to deliver regulated and unregulated qualifications, or units from these qualifications, must demonstrate the ability to manage and deliver the units and/or the qualification, including adherence to quality assurance and assessment regulations. A LASER Quality and Curriculum Reviewer will regularly monitor your centre and report on compliance with the terms and conditions of the Centre Recognition Agreement.

14a. Internal Quality Assurance

Internal quality assurance is the process by which centres regularly sample and evaluate assessment tasks, practices and decisions and act on the findings to ensure adherence to the principles of assessment.

Your centre must have in place an effective internal quality assurance system to ensure assessment practices and decisions are regularly reviewed and evaluated to confirm the validity of assessment. An internal quality assurance plan must be developed before the assessment cycle begins to indicate what will happen, when, who is involved and how it will be recorded, though systems will vary between centres according to what is appropriate to each centre's situation.

Your centre's internal quality assurance will be monitored and reported on by the LASER Quality and Curriculum Reviewer.

Internal quality assurance arrangements must include as a minimum:

- An identified individual responsible for co-ordinating the internal quality assurance process.
- An internal quality assurance strategy that incorporates all of your centre's provision.
- An agreed and planned annual timetable for internal quality assurance activities, including internal quality assurance meetings.
- Clear and documented roles and responsibilities for all those involved.
- A forum for discussion of borderline cases and good practice in assessment.
- Sampling of assessment tasks and assessed work.
- Standardisation of assessed work.
- Full and clear records and action plans.
- Regular evaluation of the internal quality assurance process.

When planning internal quality assurance activities the internal quality assurer must take into account delivery sites, number of assessors, range of units, unit levels, assessment methods, borderline cases, reasonable adjustments and any issues arising from previous Quality and Curriculum Reviewer reports. The internal quality assurer should specify the sample of assessed work from each assessor they want to see. It is important that the sample is sufficient to form a view on the consistency and validity of the assessment. It must cover all units and should be increased for new qualifications or assessors new to units and qualifications.

Internal quality assurance of assessment tasks and activities should take place before the tasks are put to use, and assessor practices and decisions should be sampled by the internal quality assurer both during the assessment period and at the end of each course.

LASER has created a number of internal quality assurance forms which are available on the LASER website, to help support internal quality assurers set up workable and coherent planning, tracking and recording system for internal quality assurance of learners' achievements. Forms which you might find useful include:

- IQA01 Record Keeping to Evidence IQA Assurance.
- IQA02 Internal Quality Assurance Report on Single Learner portfolio.
- IQA03 Internal Quality Assurance Sampling Record.
- IQA04 Report on Internal Quality Assurance Visit to Learners.
- IQA05 Internal Quality Assurer Feedback to Assessor Report.
- IQA07 Sampling Record.
- IQA08 Internal Quality Assurance Quality Checklist.
- IQA09 Pre-Course Verification.

14b. Standardisation

Internal standardisation is the standardisation of assessment practice where there is more than one assessor responsible for the same or similar courses and assessment decisions. Standardisation ensures that the assessment criteria for a qualification or unit are applied consistently by assessors and internal quality assurers.

It is recommended that internal standardisation meetings are held which include all assessors and internal quality assurers involved with LASER qualifications, and where required action plans are produced which are subsequently followed up.

LASER has created a number of standardisation forms which are available on the LASER website, to help support assessors and internal quality assurers' record standardisation activities. Forms which you might find useful include:

- IQA06 Standardisation Record
- IQA10 Standardisation Meeting Agenda

LASER holds annual standardisation events to ensure that comparable standards are achieved year on year and that there is a consistency of delivery and assessment across all centres. Please visit the LASER website for information on how to reserve a place.

14c. Direct Claims Status

Your centre can apply for direct claims status (DCS) for one or more sectors. This allows the authorised internal quality assurer (AIQA) to claim achievement within their approved sector(s). AIQAs are responsible for ensuring the security of the award of credit by checking that their centre's internal quality systems are appropriate and implemented correctly.

Benefits include the facility to claim immediate learner achievements as and when they complete regulated and unregulated qualifications, for which they have been registered.

All LASER AIQAs are required to attend a minimum of one AIQA networking event at least every two years. Details of these events can be found on the LASER website, where places may also be booked. In the alternating year, you will receive a visit from a Quality and Curriculum Reviewer.

To achieve DCS, your centre must have a good quality assurance record and at least one appropriate internal quality assurer who can apply for AIQA status. The Application and Evidence Checklist forms can be downloaded from the LASER website and should be completed and submitted to LASER.

14d. External Quality Assurance

External quality assurance is the process by which LASER ensures that all centres are continuing to meet the required standards in order to be assured of the validity of all its awards, and also by which LASER supports its centres.

Quality and Curriculum Reviewers will be appointed by LASER who will be conversant with the subject area and the assessment requirements for each qualification.

The role of the Quality and Curriculum Reviewer includes the following:

- Audit of the centre recognition process.
- Sampling of centres and their delivery and assessment facilities and practice.
- Monitoring internal quality assurance systems and the sampling of assessment outcomes and recording.
- Ensuring that the centre assessment processes operate satisfactorily.
- Acting as a source of advice and support.
- Promoting best practice.

Key responsibilities of the Quality and Curriculum Reviewer include:

- Ensuring centres' compliance with the qualification specification and assessment requirements.
- Ensuring approved centre procedures are followed.
- Assessing the quality of the learner experience.
- Scrutinising internal monitoring activities.

- Reporting to LASER on the outcomes of external scrutiny in relation to the maintenance of standards.

The Quality and Curriculum Reviewer will review your centre against the conditions for recognition to ensure continuing compliance with the regulatory requirements for the delivery and assessment of the qualifications.

15. Malpractice and Maladministration

As part of the regulatory requirements for approval, your centre is required to have in place a policy and procedure for dealing with actual or suspected malpractice/maladministration by centre staff and/or learners. The policy should be written in plain language and communicated to learners as well as all staff involved in the management, delivery and administration of qualifications. The policy must provide clear information about what is defined as malpractice and maladministration, how staff or learners should report it and to whom, what to expect if making such a report, and the centre's procedure for dealing with such reports.

Any suspicion or accusation of malpractice or maladministration must be reported to LASER immediately, whether it involves centre staff and/or learners. A Report of Suspected Malpractice (M1) Form is available on the LASER website, and should be completed and submitted to the LASER Quality Manager. Further information and guidance is provided on the LASER website.

Examples (not exhaustive) of possible centre malpractice include:

- Providing learners with assistance during examinations, such as explaining questions or suggesting answers.
- Assisting learners in the production of work for assessment, where the support has the potential to influence the outcomes of assessment, and/or where the assistance involves centre staff producing work for the learner.
- Facilitating and/or allowing impersonation.
- Misusing the arrangements for reasonable adjustments or special conditions, for example where learners are permitted support.
- Falsifying records or certificates, for example by alteration, substitution, or by fraud.
- Fraudulent certificate claims, that is claiming for a certificate without the learner having completed all of the requirements of assessment.
- Failing to keep assessment materials and examination papers secure prior to the assessment or examination.
- Altering or forging any assessment or examination documentation.

Examples (not exhaustive) of possible learner malpractice include:

- Cheating in assessments/examinations.
- Plagiarism.
- Destruction of another learner's work.
- Disruptive behaviour.

Examples (not exhaustive) of possible centre maladministration include:

- Failing to keep complete and accurate records.
- Failing to follow administrative procedures.
- Failing to register courses/learners within the required timeframes.
- Failing to pay invoices within the required timeframe.

16. Complaints

As part of the regulatory requirements for approval, your centre is required to have in place a policy and procedure for dealing with complaints made by centre staff and/or learners. The policy should be written in plain language and communicated to learners as well as all staff involved in the management, delivery and administration of qualifications. The policy must provide clear information about what is defined as a complaint, how staff or learners should make a complaint and to whom, what to expect if making a complaint, and the centre's procedure for dealing with complaints.

LASER is unable to deal with complaints from learners or centre staff about a centre, or to intervene in disputes between learners or centre staff and the centre, except in cases where the complainant has followed the centre's complaints policy and procedures and the matter has not been resolved (or the centre has failed to follow its own policy and procedures). Further details can be found on the LASER website.

17. Appeals

As part of the regulatory requirements for approval, your centre is required to have in place a policy and procedure for dealing with appeals made by learners against an internal assessment decision (ie an assessment decision taken by centre staff) and by learners and centre staff against other decisions. The policy should be written in plain language and communicated to learners as well as all staff involved in the management, delivery and administration of qualifications. The policy must provide clear information about what can be appealed, how to make an appeal and to whom, what to expect if making an appeal, and the centre's procedure for dealing with appeals.

Appeals by a learner against an external assessment decision (ie an assessment decision taken by LASER) must be made directly to LASER. Further details can be found on the LASER website.