Internal Quality Assurance Centre Guidance

1. Introduction

This guidance is intended to support centres approved to deliver OTHM qualifications with effective approaches to Internal Quality Assurance (IQA). It outlines expectations for IQA practice, identifies common areas of concern, and promotes a developmental approach to IQA that goes beyond basic compliance.

The guidance applies to all qualifications where internal assessment is a component and where centres are responsible for maintaining the validity and reliability of assessment decisions through IQA. It should be read in conjunction with OTHM qualification specifications and EQA Centre Guidance.

OTHM does not mandate any *specific* systems or processes in relation to centre IQA, but evidence of effective IQA will be sought through sampling activity and a range of other External Quality Assurance (EQA) measures.

Effective IQA should serve two primary purposes:

1. **Assurance** – confirming that assessment decisions are valid, reliable, and in line with AO expectations. Verifying that evidence to support assessment decisions is clear and consistent

2. **Improvement** – using findings from IQA (and EQA) activity to improve assessor performance, learner experience, and centre processes.

Centres should incorporate both aspects into their IQA strategy and should be able to generate evidence that assessor decisions have been subject to scrutiny and that feedback has been actioned. IQA should be carried out prior to EQA requests being submitted for consideration.

2. IQA Roles and Responsibilities

(Lead) IQA

Responsible for providing strategic and operational leadership of the internal quality assurance process at the centre. Their responsibilities may include:

- Management and oversight of the Centre's IQA strategy, ensuring it supports continuous improvement and meets OTHM's requirements.
- Sampling assessor judgements to ensure accuracy, consistency, and alignment with AO expectations.
- Observation of teaching and learning, where applicable, to inform quality assurance and staff development.
- Monitoring assessment practices, including feedback quality, assessment decisions, and learner support.
- Providing developmental feedback and support to assessors, promoting reflective practice and continuous improvement.
- Coordinating and overseeing standardisation activities, ensuring consistency across assessors and delivery teams.
- Sharing best practice across delivery teams and contributing to the centre's internal staff development and quality improvement planning.
- Ensuring IQA records and sampling plans are maintained and available for review by EQAs or during audits.
- Ensuring any actions or recommendations from external quality assurance reports are addressed in a timely manner.

The Lead IQA should hold a recognised Level 4 IQA qualification, such as:

- Level 4 Award in the Internal Quality Assurance of Assessment Processes and Practice
- V1 Internal Verifier Award
- D34 Internal Verifier Unit (or other legacy equivalents)

See the OTHM Centre Staffing Requirements for further information.

Other IQA roles and responsibilities include:

Tutors / Assessors
Respond to IQA feedback, maintain standards, and participate in standardisation activities.

Centre Quality Lead
Oversee implementation of the IQA strategy, ensure training and CPD, and respond to QA actions.

EQAs (OTHM)
Review IQA effectiveness during unit sampling and other monitoring activities, provide feedback, and make recommendations for centre development. Note that EQAs do not assess learner work but rather make a judgement on evidence provided by the assessor and IQA to justify the grade awarded by the centre.

Quality Assurance Team (OTHM)
Monitor patterns of IQA compliance, support development where necessary, and track QA actions over time.

Note that some staff may have more than one role as appropriate.

3. Monitoring and EQA Expectations

EQAs and the OTHM Quality Assurance team will routinely request evidence of IQA during monitoring activity, including:

- The most recent IQA report for each unit sampled
- Assignment brief approvals where applicable
- Evidence of feedback to assessors
- Records relating to overturned grades

While poor IQA practice alone may not prevent learner grades from being approved (unless there is also evidence of invalid assessment decisions), issues will be formally recorded and may result in:

- Feedback for continuous improvement
- Action points monitored by the QA team
- Centre risk rating changes or closer scrutiny in future EQA activity

OTHM may mandate additional IQA review in cases where:

- A unit grade is overturned by the EQA (even if unit results are approved overall)
- There is consistent evidence of inadequate or superficial IQA
- Learner work shows inconsistencies that IQA has not identified

Centres will be advised in advance that IQA documentation will be requested and must be available for review during Centre Quality Reviews or other centre audit activity.

4. Recommendations and Best Practice

The following practices are strongly encouraged to promote robust IQA and quality improvement:

- Maintain a live IQA log, recording the scope of sampling, staff covered, issues identified, and actions taken.
- Use a standardised IQA form or digital platform that captures scrutiny of feedback, commentary on assessment decisions, and developmental feedback to assessors.
- Plan and deliver regular standardisation meetings with documented outputs.
- Establish clear escalation routes where assessment concerns or inconsistencies are identified.
- Link IQA findings to centre training plans or CPD for assessors.
- Involve the IQA team in annual self-assessment reviews and external quality assurance preparation.

IQA should be integrated into wider quality improvement planning within the centre, including:

- Lesson observations (where applicable)
- Learner and employer feedback
- Analysis of achievement data
- Actions arising from previous EQA or internal audit reports
- Participation in internal and external standardisation events

IQA should verify that assessors have engaged meaningfully with the learner work and should show that individualised feedback has been provided to learners. Assessment decisions should be justified with clear rationale and mapped to learning outcomes and assessment criteria.

IQAs should provide constructive, developmental feedback to assessors — identifying both strengths and areas for improvement. This feedback should be formally recorded and reviewed during standardisation or assessor meetings.

5. IQA Sampling Strategies

Centres should consider what level of sampling is sufficient for their qualifications, accounting for factors such as tutor experience, cohort size, qualification level, and previous EQA findings.

Sampling rates should be adjusted for risk and centres will be required to demonstrate that IQA is effective and sufficient.

Sampling should include different assessors, learner levels, and assessment methods where applicable.

Where anomalous grading is identified (e.g., unit grade overturned by an EQA), the IQA process should include a review of the assessor's decision-making, even if the qualification is approved at EQA.

Centres should document their IQA rationale for the chosen sampling strategy and review their approach at least annually or when staff / qualification risk changes.

Example IQA strategies are shown below for consideration:

Example 1: Standard Sampling Strategy (Low-Risk, Experienced Team)

The centre has an experienced team of assessors and IQAs with consistent good practice verified through previous EQA reviews.

Approach:

- Sampling frequency: 10–20% of learners work per unit or per cohort.
- Sampling type: Combination of interim and summative sampling.
- Sample coverage:
    - At least one learner from each assessor.
    - Range of grades or achievement outcomes (pass / refer).
    - Range of assessment methods used.

Rationale: Confirms consistent assessment decisions across assessors and ensures ongoing quality maintenance.

Action: If no issues are identified, continue at the same frequency; if concerns arise, increase sampling rates temporarily.

Example 2: Risk-Based Sampling

The centre applies a dynamic strategy informed by risk factors.

Risk factors might include:
- New or unqualified assessors
- New or high-risk qualifications
- High learner volume or rapid growth
- Previous external quality assurance (EQA) action points

Approach:

Risk Level	Sampling Rate	Focus
Low	10–15%	Routine verification across assessors and units
Medium	25–50%	Focus on higher-risk assessors or new units / qualifications
High	75–100%	Full verification until confidence restored

Rationale: Sampling is adjusted according to live risk ratings and reviewed after each IQA cycle.

Action: Record rationale for sampling level in the IQA plan.

Example 3: Thematic Sampling

The IQA / EQA identifies recurring themes or areas of concern from previous reviews.

Approach:

- Sampling frequency: Flexible — depending on identified theme.
- Sampling focus:
    - Select samples across multiple assessors and units focusing on the same aspect (e.g. written feedback, use of observation records).

Rationale: Allows the IQA to monitor specific quality indicators across the team.

Action: Findings inform CPD or standardisation sessions.

Example 4: Rolling or Rotational Sampling

Large cohort size or multiple qualifications running at the same time.

Approach:

- Sampling frequency: Spread across delivery period (monthly or per assessment milestone).
- Sampling method:
  - Rotate focus: one month sample Unit 1 across all assessors; next month, Unit 2, etc.
  - Ensure each assessor and unit are covered at least once per delivery cycle.

Rationale: Reduces IQA workload peaks and supports continuous oversight.

Action: Adjust schedule if any assessor or qualification area shows increased risk.

Example 5: End-of-Cycle Summative Sampling

Small numbers of learners or qualifications with infrequent submissions.

Approach:

- Sampling frequency: 100% interim sampling for first submission, then summative sampling for remaining work.

Rationale: Maintains oversight without excessive duplication of effort in small cohorts.

Action: Document decisions and ensure feedback informs assessor standardisation.

These examples are not exhaustive and may be used individually or in combination, and as part of a broader quality assurance strategy.

6. Regulatory References

- **A1:** Suitability for continuing recognition
- **A5:** Availability of adequate resources and arrangements
- **A6:** Identification and management of risks
- **A7:** Management of incidents
- **A8:** Malpractice and maladministration
- **C1:** Arrangements with third parties
- **C2:** Arrangements with Centres
- **E4:** Ensuring an assessment is fit for purpose and can be delivered
- **E10:** Recognition of Prior Learning
- **G1:** Setting the assessment
- **G2:** Language of the assessment
- **G4:** Maintaining Confidentiality of assessment materials
- **G6:** Arrangements for Reasonable Adjustments
- **G7:** Arrangements for Special Consideration
- **G8:** Completion of the assessment under the required conditions
- **G9:** Delivering the assessment
- **H1:** Marking the assessment
- **H2:** Centre Assessment Standard Scrutiny where assessment is marked by a Centre
- **H3:** Monitoring the specified levels of attainment for a qualification
- **H5:** Results for a qualification must be based on sufficient evidence

7. Version Control

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1.0	October 2025	New
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