



External Quality Assurance Policy

October 2025



The
Workforce
Development
Trust



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1. Purpose

This policy explains how SFJ Awards carries out External Quality Assurance ('EQA') of our Approved Centres.

Our EQA process helps us to make sure that:

- Assessment decisions are valid, reliable, and consistent
- Centre staff are sufficiently experienced/qualified to undertake their role
- Assessment tasks are appropriate
- Learners get fair outcomes
- Our qualifications meet regulatory requirements
- Requests for RPL and reasonable adjustments are dealt with in line with SFJ Awards requirements (where SFJ Awards policies allow such decision to be delegated to the Centre)

This policy applies to all Centres approved by SFJ Awards, and to all qualifications by SFJ Awards, including apprenticeship assessments that do not fall under the 'End-Point Assessment' model.

2. Our Approach to External Quality Assurance

We take a **risk-based approach** towards External Quality Assurance. This means we focus more attention on Centres where the potential risk to learners or qualification standards is higher.

We consider a range of factors when assessing risk, including (but not limited to):

- Centre performance and compliance history
- Experience of staff
- Volume of learners
- Type and level of qualification
- Concerns raised by learners, staff or other stakeholders

This approach helps us use our resources in a fair and proportionate way, while still maintaining quality and consistency across all Centres.

Whilst SFJ Awards does plan EQA activity based upon risk, SFJ Awards does not share risk ratings with Centres or with third parties.

As a minimum, all active Centres will be subject to one EQA activity in a 12-month period, which will ensure that the Centre continues to meet SFJ Awards requirements to remain an Approved Centre.

SFJ Awards will charge for EQA activity in line with our published fees and charges.

3. How SFJ Awards Carries Out EQA

We use a mix of methods to carry out EQA activity. These may include:

- **Remote monitoring** (e.g. online systems, phone or video meetings)
- **Face-to-face visits** to Centres
- **Unannounced visits** in certain cases (e.g. where risk is high, or concerns have been raised)

SFJ Awards will undertake different types of EQA visit, which may include:

- **Compliance and Sampling Visit** – this is an annual activity to ensure that Centres continue to meet the requirements of SFJ Awards Centre Approval. Whilst a ‘CSV’ may include sampling, the main purpose of this visit will be to establish whether the Centre continues to meet SFJ Awards criteria for Centre Approval.
- **Sampling activity** – this will focus on the sampling of Centre assessment. The EQA will sample assessed work, Internal Quality Assurance Records (including records relating to the pre-verification of assessment tasks) and may speak to learners or seek to view learner feedback. The purpose of a sampling visit is to establish that Centre Assessment Standards are subject to External Scrutiny by SFJ Awards.
- **Support Activity** – to support a Centre to meet SFJ Awards standards. Such visits may be required by SFJ Awards following an action plan or may be arranged at the request of the Centre.

Each Centre will be assigned an **External Quality Assurer (EQA)** who will be the main point of contact and who will carry out EQA activity as required.

Most EQA activity will take place at a time and date that is mutually agreed by the Centre. However, Centres should be aware that ‘putting off’ a visit until a later date may result in loss of direct claims and may result in SFJ Awards putting a registration block in place until we can be assured that standards meet our expectations. We will endeavour to give reasonable notice before an EQA visit, but we reserve the right to carry out unannounced visits.

Centres that operate in high the licence-linked Security sector should expect that SFJ Awards and/or SIA (the Security Industry Authority) may visit any active course at any time. Similarly, Centres offering qualifications endorsed by the National Counter Terrorism Security Office (‘NaCTSO’) should also expect that an unannounced visit may happen during any active course.

4. SFJ Awards External Quality Assurance Associates

SFJ Awards uses a team of External Quality Assurance Associates ('EQAs'), who are selected based upon their subject expertise. EQAs undertake an induction programme and are observed performing an EQA before they may undertake independent EQA work. SFJ Awards monitors EQA reports, feedback from Centres and undertakes standardisation activity to ensure that Centres can expect consistent decisions from our EQA team. EQAs are SFJ Awards representatives and will support the Centre with all matters of assessment and Internal Quality Assurance. SFJ Awards expects our EQAs to be supportive whilst also maintaining the rigour of our qualifications.

Centres are reminded that it is the Centres responsibility to respond to learner enquiries. **Under no circumstances should learners be encouraged to contact the EQA** or to contact SFJ Awards directly.

5. What We Expect from Centres

We expect all Centres to:

- Cooperate fully with EQA activity.
- Retain evidence relating to all assessment and Internal Quality Assurance that has taken place since the last EQA activity.
- Provide access to learner evidence, records, and internal quality assurance documentation.
- Communicate honestly with SFJ Awards if there is an issue with the availability of certain records.
- Allow EQAs to speak with relevant staff and learners where needed.
- Act promptly on any actions or recommendations arising from EQA reports.
- Tell us if a course is cancelled – we will charge if an unannounced visit is undertaken and teaching or assessment is not taking place.

SFJ Awards will act in line with our Sanctions policy where a Centre does not allow EQA to take place or is unable to provide suitable evidence for the purpose of EQA.

6. Reporting and Follow-Up

After each EQA activity, the EQA will complete a report which:

- Summarises findings
- Identifies any non-compliance or areas for improvement
- Includes clear actions with deadlines, where required

Where serious or repeated issues are found, we may take further action in line with our **Sanctions Policy**. Centres should expect that the report will be shared with them within 20 working days of the EQA activity taking place.

SFJ Awards EQAs may recommend in their report that a sanction is given, however all decisions to apply a sanction will be made by the Quality Assurance team in line with SFJ Awards Sanctions policy.

7. Direct Claims

Following a satisfactory EQA activity, SFJ Awards may confer Direct Claims Status ('DCS') upon a Centre for some or all of its provision. Direct Claims allows a Centre to make certification claims for learners without the associated evidence needing to be subject to EQA in advance of certification.

Direct Claims will not be granted until a Centre has demonstrated compliance with SFJ Awards requirements over a period of time and would usually not be granted within the first 12 months of Centre Approval.

Direct Claims is reliant on all assessment and IQA evidence being retained by the Centre until the following EQA activity has taken place. Where a Centre has awarded a qualification through Direct Claims and SFJ Awards later finds the assessment decision to be unsafe, SFJ Awards will treat this as malpractice and will give consideration to the withdrawal of any associated certificates. In such circumstances, SFJ Awards may notify regulators and other Awarding Organisations.

Direct Claims may be withdrawn following an EQA activity where the EQA recommends that the Centre's processes are no longer suitable to support Direct Claims.

Direct Claims will be awarded for a specific period of time not exceeding 12 months. Direct Claims will be revoked where a Centre does not engage with SFJ Awards monitoring activity.

Direct Claims is not permanent and therefore **Centres should not use the fact they have Direct Claims status in advertising, promotional material or social media posts.** Where a Centre does make this claim, SFJ Awards may require the Centre to remove the claim from their advertising material.

8. Review

We regularly review our EQA approach to make sure it remains effective, proportionate, and in line with the requirements of our regulators:

- Ofqual (England)
- CCEA Regulation (Northern Ireland)
- Qualifications Wales (Wales)
- SQA Accreditation / Qualifications Scotland (Scotland)
- SIA (Licence-linked Security Industry qualifications)

9. Contact Us

If you have any questions about this policy or about our EQA process, please contact:

- **Email:** info@sfjawards.com
- **Phone:** 0114 284 1970



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