

Vocational Qualifications (QCF, NVQ, NQF)

Business and Administration

Level 2 Certificate Business and Administration (NVQ) – **04705**

Level 3 Diploma Business and Administration (NVQ) – **04708**

Level 4 Diploma Business and Administration (NVQ) – **04710**

OCR Report to Centres 2013-2014

OCR (Oxford Cambridge and RSA) is a leading UK awarding body, providing a wide range of qualifications to meet the needs of candidates of all ages and abilities. OCR qualifications include AS/A Levels, Diplomas, GCSEs, Cambridge Nationals, Cambridge Technicals, Functional Skills, Key Skills, Entry Level qualifications, NVQs and vocational qualifications in areas such as IT, business, languages, teaching/training, administration and secretarial skills.

It is also responsible for developing new specifications to meet national requirements and the needs of students and teachers. OCR is a not-for-profit organisation; any surplus made is invested back into the establishment to help towards the development of qualifications and support, which keep pace with the changing needs of today's society.

This report on the examination provides information on the performance of candidates which it is hoped will be useful to teachers in their preparation of candidates for future examinations. It is intended to be constructive and informative and to promote better understanding of the specification content, of the operation of the scheme of assessment and of the application of assessment criteria.

Reports should be read in conjunction with the published question papers and mark schemes for the examination.

OCR will not enter into any discussion or correspondence in connection with this report.

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1 The qualifications and standards

- **Structure and content**

Assessment Team:

The EV team have once again reported that staff undertaking assessment and verification activities are suitably qualified and experienced with many holding teaching qualifications, as well as assessor and updated IQA qualifications.

It is noticeable in some centres that staff turnover is high but centres do support new assessors and IQAs on the team very well.

A wide range of evidence is encouraged and the personal reports or case studies in some centres are particularly noteworthy.

Candidate feedback – usually now by telephone – is very encouraging regarding the support received from their assessors.

IQA activities were found to be planned at the start of the programme and include formative and summative assessments. In many cases the schedule for internal verification is placed in the centre file and tracking systems in order to allow for a clear audit trail.

EVs have reported that many of the observation reports are written in detail, stating when and where this took place and many centres use digital recording of these, together with photographs.

Standardisation meetings are held in centres – generally on a monthly basis – to ensure the standardisation of assessment. Some centres have other activities as determined by their management teams. EVs report that standardisation practice would appear to be sound.

There have been no queries on standards or on assessment by email or telephone this year from the EV team.

EVs should use the correct term when referring to apprentices – there is no longer a modern apprenticeship.

There have been no significant issues with centres this year.

Resources:

EVs report that in all cases the respective teams are competent and qualified.

With regard to the use of e-portfolios, this would seem to be steadily increasing on these schemes, with Onefile growing in popularity with many OCR centres.

All EVs reported, where applicable, that the workplaces (in which most of the assessment takes place) were fit for purpose and complied with health and safety requirements. Extracts from reports include:

There is well established small assessment team at xxx. The team work together with the other campuses to ensure consistency across the campuses, for example by having joint standardisation and CPD activities. The centre could use this opportunity to review and develop current practice to further integrate best practice.

The learners work in a virtual company "xxxxxxx" which offers a realistic work environment.

This allows learners the opportunity to gain on the job experience and practice. The centre has reviewed the organisation of the RWE as is now able to offer more candidates the opportunity to take on supervisory roles in order to enable them to gain Level 3. The College supports its learners well offering them a wide range of resources to support them in achieving their qualification. However, the centre needs to consider how changes to the operation of the virtual company will affect the learner's opportunity to demonstrate competence and that the centre still meets the requirements of a RWE.

There are sufficient assessment personnel for the numbers on programme. One team member is an OCR EQA for a wide range of QCF qualifications. CPD activities are maintained, recorded and are available for inspection. All assessment personnel are occupationally competent and qualified. All locations are monitored to ensure compliance with current health and safety legislation.

Candidate Support:

EVs have reported that candidates in centres are very well supported. In many centres additional support is provided to those candidates who have been identified as needing such support.

EVs are keen to report what they have discussed with centres by way of improving their practice.

Most EVs report that while unit certification is available as required it is not often used. This clearly confirms that assessment teams are assessing holistically.

Examples from reports include:

All learners receive induction, information about the programme, qualification, assessment and appeals. Evidence was contained in all portfolios sampled to confirm that this had taken place.

Excellent practice is demonstrated in initial assessment to identify the appropriate level and optional unit; individual training and assessment plans; feedback is given to learners. Plans are updated on a regular basis with more detailed unit assessment plans giving clear guidance to the learner of assessment expectations... If additional support is identified, College resources are accessed. The centre has made changes to the structure of the RWE to develop a structured progression route and to enable learners to gain the opportunity of achieving Level 3 qualifications.

A wide range of assessment methods was evident in the portfolios sampled - observation, work products, personal statements and written and oral questions. Good use is made of the candidates' prior achievement in ECDL. Unit certification is available, if required, but not often used. The team could consider if the evidence could be presented electronically rather than in hard copy format.

The centre provides detailed advice and guidance prior to enrolment and then throughout the entire programme as evidenced in the feedback to candidates and the records of initial and ongoing assessment planning. All plans are regularly reviewed and adjusted as necessary. All candidates are given a copy of the appeals procedures. The centre uses a wide range of assessment methods which ensure that the candidates have the opportunity to succeed. Unit certification is permitted but was not required at the visit.

Assessment and verification

EVs naturally report some very good and consistent centre practice:

IQA activities are both formative and summative. The feedback reports to the assessors are detailed and list the actions to be taken. Observation is carried out early into the programme with the subsequent reports clear and in depth, as are the professional discussions. Evidence that is not clear is annotated. The portfolios are put together in a systematic way with each section being clearly labelled. The portfolios sampled at this visit were all of a high standard.

EVs report that the majority of centres now maintain an effective centre file in which a range of policies and procedures are placed, including IV plans etc – this is easy to check and very welcome.

Some EVs have reported good relationships with various employers who show a real interest in the programme – with high quality witness testimony as a result highlighting how candidates/apprentices are real assets to the organisation. Many centres provide detailed information to witness which helps in the production of quality testimony.

Some EVs manage to be able to review supporting materials for example:

All new learners undergo an initial assessment and skills scan for suitability to the programme. A TNA is then drawn up and workshops allocated where appropriate. Assessment takes place through action and assessment planning agreed with the learner. Assessment practices cover a wide range and I sampled portfolio building with observation, written/oral questioning, product evidence, witness testimony, and product all presented by e-portfolio on e track to which I have my own log in and access. There is evidence that one learner only accessed two units through the credit accumulation scheme.

There appears to be much sharing of good practice across teams both within centres and across partnerships.

Staff CPD has continued, including the 'learning square' whereby different sector staff come together to meet and observe and share good practice.

All policies are documented and copies provided. Statistics are analysed. The centre administrator provided all the necessary documentation for the visit well in advance and subsequently arranged all the requested portfolios to be available. This person is a former Level 4 candidate who is proving to be a valuable member of the team and takes great care in his planning of an EQA visit.

Employers are involved in the ILP's, reviews and feedback.

EVs generally report well-presented portfolios with a wide range of evidence:

College Internal Quality Assurance procedures are used by all IQAs. IQA plans were available for inspection at today's visit. They show that all units of the qualification over all assessors are sampled over a period of time. Records are kept up to date and maintained by the relevant IQAs.

Standardisation meetings are held regularly and minutes were available for the EQA at today's visit. All assessment and internal quality assurance is carried out by qualified and occupationally competent team members. The centre coordinator is responsible for the dissemination of awarding body information and feedback from EQA visits. The centre portfolios were, as always, of a high standard, with a methodical approach to layout which makes auditing them very effective and efficient.

The IQA strategy shows that each learner's work is visited a minimum of twice – formatively and summarily – the full range of methods and units have been covered. There is clear evidence of standardisation meetings having been held. Assessor records are managed through the e-portfolio process and I could see the IQA footprint within that process. All staff are occupationally competent and one of them is a designated assessor with an action plan in place for achievement in December 2014. All action point raised at last visit were complied with.

All assessors, units and assessment methods are included and there is clear written feedback given. Feedback now includes a target date for any actions to be achieved.

The portfolios are well very laid out and easy to verify. They contain a good range of evidence which clearly demonstrates competence. There needs to be a clear distinction between Level 1 and Level 2 learners as there is some over evidencing at the lower level. Learners have been (close up) encouraged to write personal statements about their work which is very good practice. The centre could consider including a daily diary from the learners to reflect on the work and achievements while working in the virtual company. EQA feedback is discussed with the team and minutes of meetings confirmed that actions and recommendations from previous visits have been addressed.

The senior management continues to support the delivery and assessment of OCR verified qualifications and this experienced team has a very clear and accurate understanding of the related policies. The centre, as would be expected of a college, has detailed and sensible policies on access and fair assessment which, again, are fully understood and implemented by the team.

The centre maintains a file of correspondence with OCR which demonstrates an appropriate dialogue and response to issues or queries. All requests for access were met. The centre uses a range of information including feedback from employers and candidates to evaluate all aspects of the qualification and to enhance future delivery.

It is pleasing to note that in some centres real efforts have been made to reduce the amount of paper evidence in portfolios with a slight increase by centres moving to e-portfolio or using more digital recording of observations and professional discussions.

EVs report that in most of their large centres there are standard policies and procedures which operate across all schemes and several awarding bodies. They confirm that the records in place that are easy to follow and give a clear audit trail.

They regularly report that all requested information was supplied ready for the visit and all portfolios, staff and candidates requested were available without any issues reported.

Many EV reports confirmed that centres continue to be well supported by senior management and all policies were in place and up to date.

EVs have also been quick to applaud good practice in their centres – showing how effective their work with a centre over time has been.

Roles and responsibilities are clearly understood by all and are evident on a clear organisational chart and in discussion with the team. There are detailed procedures including equal opportunities, assessment and quality and these are monitored and have been updated across all campuses following the merger. Regular cross campus meetings take place to ensure effective communication between the college assessment team. The team work closely together and resolve issues/problems on an on-going basis. All information provided regarding candidates was accurate and detailed. All requested portfolios were available for sample. The centre has a commitment to quality improvement and carries out regular reviews to ensure their learners are achieving and meet the required standard.

However, they are also very clear when they require things to change.

Management Systems and Records:

Often this section is brief but succinct in the majority of cases:

Even with the departure of the very experienced centre coordinator, the team still remains sufficiently competent and qualified to meet the cohort size. Staff development is available and encouraged to ensure that occupational competence is maintained, in addition to updating in the general NVQ area. All candidates are in the work place and the college ensures that all locations meet the appropriate statutory and regulatory requirements.

Assessment Summary:

A few EVs have made very detailed comments in regard to this aspect – particularly good examples are as follows:

Clear information on IQA proposed and actual activities are provided prior to visits and the decisions of the assessors are sampled to ensure standards are met. When there are issues, clear information is fed back to the assessor and the issue promptly rectified or brought through to standardisation meetings. IQAs evidence that they are particularly focussed on ensuring the learning outcomes for knowledge aspects are sufficiently met.

A particularly noteworthy Level 3 portfolio presented by one learner was a pleasure to read. This learner had been supported by the assessor and the employer to select the most appropriate units to enable her to highlight not only her extensive administrative skills but also her creative abilities within a pharmaceutical environment in order to produce a wide range of extremely high quality and attractive documents and presentations to support branch openings and health initiatives. Even the photographic evidence she supplied was arranged and annotated creatively.

2 Sector Developments

With the advent of the new standards hopefully the take up of the units will reflect the modern administrator. It is pleasing to note the involvement of chiefs in the standards reviews.

There are over 3.25 million people in the UK currently working in business and administration roles with thousands working in positions which require administration skills in some respect. Current workers are retiring, reducing their hours or leaving altogether with the impact of a loss of capability and experience very quickly. Many sectors are now entering a critical period: the ageing 'baby boomers' are approaching retirement and beginning to reduce their hours or leave altogether. The prosperity of individuals, businesses and the nation depends, in part, on the acquisition of professional administration skills.

There needs to be a strong focus on those aspects of work which have increased in importance in recent years, such as communication and negotiation, working with others, dealing with change, solving business problems, supporting sustainability and managing risk. Other crucial sectors are also supported by specialist units covering the areas of agriculture, custodial care, legal, parking, education, human resources. The growing areas of self-employment and recent trends in business have tended towards more horizontal management structures with fewer hierarchical levels. This has meant that less administrative support is now available within teams and subsequently there is an expectation that people will be able to carry out their own administration working in virtual teams and remotely.

Almost three quarters of British businesses believe that the UK will be in the grips of a skills crisis within the next three years, according to new research. The report, by The Prince's Trust in partnership with HSBC, found that a third of organisations are experiencing skills shortages at entry level, while over half are unable to fill vacancies. Of the 616 UK firms questioned for the report, 68 per cent were concerned a skills shortage would slow economic growth, while 35 per cent feared it would cause their business to fold.

Further findings revealed that 72 per cent of business leaders believe recruiting young people is crucial in avoiding a skills crisis, yet 71 per cent admit that jobless young people still face stigma and negative stereotyping from employers. To avert a future skills crisis, The Prince's Trust is urging employers to invest in vocational training. This is perhaps the biggest single potential increase in candidate numbers for business and administration qualifications.

Ofsted reports continue to highlight the importance of spelling, punctuation and grammar, particularly for business administration learners. These skills are absolutely crucial and centres should be regularly monitoring their effectiveness. As administrators, learners (and their tutors/assessors/IQAs) should be making sure that there are no errors in personal reports, statements, work products or witness testimonies.

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