Section 6.0 Fair & Consistent Assessment of Learners

Policy:

New Links Training Solutions aims to implement fair and consistent assessment of learners. We will develop and review our processes on a continuous basis which will assist learners to achieve their specific learning outcomes, monitor learner progress and provide learner feedback in compliance with the the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012. This policy will be achieved by implementing the following procedures:

S6.1 Co-ordinated Planning & Assessment:

Assessment schedules will be agreed in advance between the tutor and the NLTS co-ordinator.
1. The tutor will inform the learners of the agreed assessment dates.
2. The NLTS co-ordinator will ensure that a suitable room will be made available and that there will be no disturbances during an assessment.
3. Tutors will be provided with a tutor pack (Scheme of Work – see NLTS 054 & SOP9) and tutor checklist (NLTS 001) which they will be expected to return to NLTS with completed assignments.
4. All tutors will be provided with a laminated 'Do Not Disturb 'notice for assessments.

S6.2 Information to learners:

1. A student handbook will be distributed to all learners – see section 1.
2. Tutors will provide a course overview to all learners at the beginning of a programme.
3. Tutors will provide an assignment overview to all learners at the beginning of a programme.
4. Tutors will monitor and review students understanding and progress at regular intervals throughout the programme.
5. Learners will be notified of the following at the beginning of the programme:
   - Any additional requirements, expected input from learners etc
   - Assessment schedules.
   - Exam timetables.
   - Appeals procedures.
   - Portfolio checklist.
   - Work experience briefing (if applicable).

Procedure Documents:
- NLTS LP002 – Assessment and skills demonstration protocol
- NLTS P005 – Portfolio compilation and marking of learners work

S6.3 Security of Assessment & Related Processes & Materials.

1. All learner assignments and related materials will be stored in a secure (lockable) cabinet in the offices of NLTS.
2. Tutors are expected to ensure that learner assignments are stored securely for the duration that they have them in their possession.

3. All assignments, materials and student correspondence including notes, letters, and emails relating to and belonging to students must be returned to NLTS for safe storage.

4. All learner correspondence and tutor correspondence relating to course activities should be directed through tutorinfo@newlinkstraining.com – no other email should be used – see **tutor induction PPT.** This is indicated on all individual assignment briefs.

5. A confidentiality awareness policy will be given to each tutor (included in the tutor handbook and Tutor Induction PPT).

6. All learners must sign a verification of authorship form for all written assignments.

7. On receipt of assignments from tutors, NLTS will complete an IV report (NLTS 0077 section 5) which will monitor and evaluate key elements of the assessment process.

S6.4 Reasonable Accommodation.

1. Tutors must endeavour at all times to accommodate students with special needs so that they can progress *unless the measures needed would place a disproportionate burden on the provider* (New Links Training Solutions).

2. NLTS and tutors will make every effort to provide reasonable accommodation to students with a disability or who are covered by the 9 grounds of equality legislation to:
   - Gain access to programmes.
   - Participate and advance on programmes.
   - To progress towards further education and/or training.

Reasonable accommodation may include the following:
- *Modification of assignment briefs.*
- *Approved scribes/readers for examinations.*
- *Rest periods or additional time for completion of exams.*
- *Compassionate consideration.*
- *Adaptive materials/equipment – tape recorders, Dictaphones, video recording, voice recognition software.*

3. NLTS will provide a request for additional supports form (NLTS 022 Section 5) to learners from the above categories.

4. NLTS will ensure that, where necessary, training equipment will be adapted to the needs of learners with disabilities.

5. NLTS will review learner evaluation sheets on a regular basis to ensure that learner's needs are accommodated.

6. NLTS is committed to the practice that all training venues are wheelchair accessible.

7. NLTS provides an individual learning plan facility on all its programmes to ensure that assignments can be adapted for learners with disabilities (NLTS 0027 – section 5).

8. NLTS tutors will be provided (if required) with a directory of services and supports for people with disabilities.

S6.5 Consistency of Marking Between Assessors.

1. All tutors/trainers will be provided with a tutor handbook outlining the principles of setting and marking assessments.

2. All tutors will be provided with the QQI assessment handbook (Assessments and standards 2013).

3. All tutors must complete an NLTS induction workshop on QQI QA in relation to setting and marking assessments – PPT in section 2.

4. All tutors will be made aware of the NLTS appeals procedure.
5. Less experienced tutors will be provided with mentoring support for an interim period of 6 months.
6. Mentoring records will be filed and stored by NLTS co-ordinator.
7. The above procedures will be monitored and reviewed on an annual basis.

S6.6 assessments performed by third parties:

1. Where assessments are carried out by third parties a letter of agreement will be issued to establish the role and remit of the third party assessor.
2. Where necessary a contract will be issued to the third party in advance.
3. Third party assessor will issue an end of programme summary report(NLTS 0074 – section 1)
4. Random visits will be made by the NLTS co-ordinator to ensure consistency and quality of service provision.

S6.7.1. Internal Verification Process

NLTS is committed to ensuring fairness, consistency, and validity of assessment and outcomes of assessment throughout all programmes which includes major awards, special purpose awards or supplement awards. The purpose of this policy is to ensure that all assessments sent to QQI are deemed to have been fairly and accurately marked in compliance with quality assurance guidelines. In order to achieve this the following procedures apply in all cases:

Responsibility: The internal verification process will be organised by the QQI co-ordinator under the supervision of management. The coordinator will appoint an independent internal verifier (a person who has not been engaged with the learners and who has not set or marked the assessments).

Methodology:

1. Before the course begins the QQI co-ordinator must have met with the tutor/s for any given programme and confirm that the tutors are suitably qualified to (A) deliver the programme and (B) qualified to assess the work of the learners.
2. A record of this meeting and copies of tutor qualifications should be placed on record in the NLTS training file.
3. QQI co-ordinator should ensure that all assignments are prepared and documented in the tutor (assessor) folder and the training file in advance of the programme delivery.
4. QQI co-ordinator must agree on an internal verification schedule with the internal verifier who will be responsible for conducting the verification in accordance with the agreed schedule.
5. Monitoring of assessments will take place on a sampling basis.

Procedural Document:

NLTS 0077 – Intake/IV report

Sampling Strategy (Ref: FESS   Quality Assuring Assessment Toolkit December 2014 p.21)

Assessment portfolios for ALL minor awards will be internally verified and externally authenticated.
The sampling strategy below will be applied by the internal verifier and the external authenticator.
A minimum of 12 assessment portfolios will be included in the sample. If there are 12 or less assessment portfolios for a minor award, all portfolios will be internally verified and externally authenticated.
If there are more than 12 assessment portfolios, the sample will be selected using the following formula: $\sqrt{n} + 1$, where n is the total number of assessment portfolios in a specified range. See table below:

Number of portfolios (range)	Minimum Sample size
0 - 12	all
13 - 144	13
145-169	14
170-196	15
197-225	16
226-256	17
257-289	18
290-324	19
325-361	20
362-400	21
401-441	22
442-484	23
485-529	24

Where the same minor award is offered in a number of courses (and/or locations) these portfolios may be combined for the purposes of sampling. If this is the case, the assessment portfolios will be clearly identified per course (and location) and per assessor so the internal verifier and the external authenticator can ensure the sample chosen includes assessment portfolios from each course (and location) and each *assessor*.
Assessment portfolios selected by the external authenticator must include the following in the sample, so as to allow the external authenticator to determine the cut-off points between the grades:
- The lowest Pass
- The highest Unsuccessful
- The lowest Distinction
- The highest Merit
- The lowest Merit
- The highest Pass

The remaining number of assessment portfolios will be randomly chosen, across all the grade bands, until the sample quota is reached.

Other Factors which must be considered when choosing a sampling of learner assessments:
- The inclusion of assessed work from all tutors must be sampled.
- The inclusion of assessed work from all programmes must be sampled.

- Identification of evidence which is borderline between grades – ie. Learners who have not or who have only barely achieved within a given grading band.
- Consideration must be given to situations where tutors use a variety of assessment methods the sample should take account of the variety and reflect same.
- The inclusion of all units when a programme is made up of a number of modules.
- Target learners – the sample should account for programme delivery to diverse learner groups – women, men, older learners, members of ethnic groups etc. The sample should reflect diversity in this situation.
- New assessor judgments – these judgments should be assessed at least once during the assessment cycle.

6. All meetings/communications will be stored/filed in compliance with General Data Protection (GDPR) policy - https://www.newlinkstraining.com/about/privacy-policy/ .
7. The internal verifier will compile an internal verification report confirming the accuracy of the assessment process and results. This report will also highlight any irregularities identified in the process.
8. The internal verifier will issue a provisional results summary report.
9. The QQI co-ordinator will arrange a meeting between the internal verifier and the results approval panel to discuss the report.
10. The panel will issue approval of provisional results.
11. Programme review meetings will be held on an ongoing basis to monitor and evaluate this process.

Frequency: Internal verification will take place (for all programmes delivered) quarterly and in conjunction with QQI deadline submission dates.

S6.7.2 External Authentication:

NLTS is committed to ensuring independent and authoritative confirmation of fair and consistent assessment of learners in accordance with National standards and in compliance with QQI quality assurance policy. We are committed to ensuring all learners and stakeholders that assessment results have been validly marked and are in compliance with the stated requirements. In order to achieve this standard the following measures are in place:

Responsibility: the QQI co-ordinator and NLTS management will meet to decide an external authenticator from the QQI approved list of external authenticators. The following criteria should be applied when choosing an external authenticator:

EA Profile:
- An external authenticator (EA) will have technical/subject matter expertise appropriate to the award/area/field of expertise that they will be assessing.
- Must have relevant experience in the delivery and assessment of programmes or currently work in the industry or field of learning being assessed.
- Agree to engage in NLTS induction/training process or related briefings either internally or with QQI.
- EAs must display the ability to interact positively with learners, assessors, and NLTS staff members.
- EAs must be proficient in administration, IT, time management and report writing.
- EAs must agree to operate within the NLTS code of practice and QQI guidelines.
- EAs must be available to NLTS at the pre-scheduled agreed times.

- EAs must be independent of the centre – ie. Must not be engaged in any other work or service provision to the centre.

Frequency: External Authentication will take place (for all programmes delivered) quarterly and in conjunction with QQI deadline submission dates.

- **Sampling Strategy –** *As per 6.7.1 section 5 above.*

Methodology:
1. The QQI co-ordinator and management must have met with the external authenticator for any given programme and confirm that they are suitably qualified.
2. A record of this meeting and copies of the external verifier qualifications should be placed on record in the NLTS training file.
3. QQI co-ordinator should ensure that the internal verification process has been completed and signed off in advance of the external authenticator's visit.
4. QQI co-ordinator must agree on an external authentication schedule with the external authenticator who will be responsible for conducting the authentication in accordance with the agreed schedule.
5. Monitoring of assessments will take place on a sampling basis as per *6.7.1 Section 5.*
6. All meetings/communication between the external authenticator, internal verifier, tutor (assessor), learners and the QQI co-ordinator must be documented and recorded in the training folder section 6 (fair and consistent assessment of learners).
7. The external authenticator will compile an external authentication report confirming the accuracy of the internal verification process and results. This report will also highlight any irregularities identified in the process.
8. The QQI co-ordinator will arrange a meeting between the internal verifier, external authenticator and the results approval panel to discuss the report.
9. The results approval panel will sign off on the approved results and recommend appropriate corrective action on any outstanding issues.
10. Approved results should immediately be made available to learners.
11. Approved results should immediately be forwarded to QQI.
12. Programme review meetings will be held on an ongoing basis to monitor and evaluate this process.

S6.8 Feedback to learners:

1. Tutors will provide both formative and summative feedback to learners throughout the programme.
2. Students will be provided with a learner feedback form (NLTS 0097) for all assignments.
3. Tutors will provide interim feedback for students in relation to draft assignments when required.
4. Students on work placement will receive feedback from employers (work placement record)
5. Informal feedback via email (tutorinfo@newlinkstraining.com) between learner and tutor is encouraged but must first be agreed between both parties. Records are held within the email account as per GDPR policy)
6. Learners may request an additional tutorial from their tutor. This arrangement falls outside of the standard course schedule and is an additional service to support learners towards course completion. If a learner wishes to avail of this service they should complete NLTS 088.

S6.9 Issue of Results to Learners (SOP 1)

1. All learners should receive a copy of our procedures on submitting results and awarding of provisional results etc
2. This document should be distributed to all learners undertaking a QQI programme with NLTS
3. Tutor highlights to learners that it will be 4-6 weeks from completion to notification of provisional results – as per NLTS policy. If a learner needs their results more urgently they should advise in writing (email) – requests will be considered on a case by case basis. All requests will be reviewed at the monthly learner meeting. Urgent requests may be brought forward to a team meeting.
4. Provisional results will be submitted to the Quality Panel by the tutor.
5. Provisional results are subject to internal verification (IV) – an IV report is prepared and signed off by designated personnel.
6. Quality Panel signs off provisional results.
7. Provisional results will be emailed to learners in a standard template document which outlines the next steps in the process and estimated certification date.

   7.1 **Sector specific programmes:**

   Security Programmes: Two blank/prepopulated TRF forms have been created to reduce the administrative burden of repeated handwritten content – basic cells are prepopulated e.g. company name/address etc

   Results to be sent by mail (hard copy) only. Results may be emailed at the request of a learner but a<u>void sending results by email and hard copy</u> as this is too time-consuming and some learners do not provide email addresses.

   Both forms are saved in the forms policies and procedures folder in the share drive.

8. All queries, requests for feedback, appeals are dealt with diligently and any associated policies, forms etc are issued to the learner. Information is outlined in the following:
   - Learner handbook
   - Tutor handbook
   - S6 Policy on fair and consistent assessment of learners
   - NLTS LP 12 – Quality Panel
   - NLTS 007 Plagiarism policy
   - NLTS LP005 Fair and consistent assessment of learners
   - NLTS 008 policy on submission of assignments (learners)
   - NLTS 0053 assignment extension request
   - NLTS 0061 Assignment resubmission request
   - NLTS 0088 Tutorial request

Note: Issue requiring further investigation: will forward to and discussed at the next scheduled Quality Panel monthly meeting
The issue of QQI Certificates:
1. All certs will be scanned for record keeping purposes
2. Certificates will be posted to learners on receipt from QQI at the end of the scheduled certification period

3. In House Programmes - Certificates will be issued to a group supervisor or manager unless otherwise agreed
4. Community Employment participants - Certificates will be issued to a group supervisor or manager unless otherwise agreed
5. TUS & other schemes - Certificates will be issued to a group supervisor or manager unless otherwise agreed
6. Insert standard pre-populated/pre-signed letter with each certificate
7. Enter a note in CEM that certificates have been posted
8. If a certificate replacement is requested refer to QQI guidelines – note only change of name requests will result in a replacement certificate being issued by QQI

S6.10 Learner Appeals:

1. Learners are entitled to make an appeal if they are not satisfied with any aspect of their learning experience.
2. Learners must complete an appeal application form **(NLTS 108 Appeal Application Form)** to New Links Training Solutions **within three weeks** of the issue of their statement of results.
3. Assessments/module/s under appeal will not be submitted for certification until the appeals process has been completed.
4. An appeals charge of €75 to cover appeal and NLTS administration and other costs.
5. No new evidence will be accepted for appeal, only the original work will be considered under the appeals process.
6. The provider will ensure that all the appropriate learner instruction evidence as set out in the module descriptor and course scheme of work are made available to the Quality committee for the appeal.
7. Evidence that is not submitted with the appeal application will be assumed to have not been completed by the learner.
8. The quality committee will review the learner appeal and examine all the evidence pertaining to the appeal application.
9. The final decision regarding the appeal will be made by the quality committee **(see section 1 operations manual)** which will comprise of a number independent decision makers.
10. The final decision will be issued in writing to the learner and the provider 4-6 weeks from the date of receipt of the appeal application.
11. **If a learner submits their appeal and are not satisfied with the result they may escalate their complaint to QQI at https://qhelp.qqi.ie/learners/**

S6.11 Results Approval:

1. NLTS will establish a results approval panel to review all submissions.
2. The panel will consist of contributions from the NLTS quality manager, tutors, and course leaders.
3. The results approval panel will sign off on all results prior to submission to QQI.
4. The results approval panel will meet on a monthly basis and will review any learner queries or assessment issues arising.
5. NLTS management will monitor and review the activities of the Quality Panel/results approval on an ongoing basis. For full details on this panel please refer to section on of the Operations manual.

S6.12 Corrective Action:

1. NLTS tutor handbook outlines tutor roles and responsibilities (see section 1).
2. NLTS learner handbook outlines guidelines for students with particular emphasis on verification of authorship and plagiarism (see section 1).
3. NLTS Operations Manual outlines all policies and procedures in relation to staff, learners, tutors, stakeholders, principles of practice and ethical responsibilities.
4. The assessment process will be evaluated regularly by internal verifiers as per 6.7.1 above and independent external authenticators as per 6.7.2 above and a results approval panel.
5. NLTS provides a comprehensive QQI assessment overview to all contracted tutors which contains an account of the assessment process adopted by NLTS under the QA agreement.
6. Any breach of the stated guidelines in the form of deliberate acts by staff, tutors or learners will be dealt with accordingly and in line with the guidelines provided (see tutor contract section 3).
7. This includes any and all deliberate acts, errors and/or omissions which could impact the validity of the assessment process.
8. Appointment of a quality committee to oversee procedures (see section 1)

Procedural Documents:

NLTS LP001 – Disciplinary policy – learner absence

NLTS LP002 – Conducting assessments and skills demonstration protocol

NLTS LP004 – Assignment re-submission procedures and learner appeals

NLTS LP005 – Fair and consistent assessment of learners policy

NLTS P005 – Portfolio compilation and marking of learners work

NLTS 007 – Plagiarism policy

NLTS 008 – submitting assignments policy

NLTS 0024 – Assignment submission/declaration of authorship

NLTS 0047 – Learner meeting record

NLTS 0053 – assignment extension request

NLTS 0061 – Assignment resubmission request

NLTS 0071 – Portfolio sign in sheet

NLTS 088 Tutorial Request

NLTS 0097 Feedback to Learners

NLTS 108 Appeal Application Form

SOP1 Issue of Results to Learners

SOP 8 Issue of QQI Certs

SOP 9 – Tutor Scheme of Work

SOP 10 Managing Learner Portfolios

Procedural Documents – Examinations

NLTS P12 – Procedure for conducting examinations

NLTS 0085 – Exam resit declaration

Examination Paper 2017

Exam attendance record

Room layout