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PART OF **nocn** GROUP

# Direct Claims Status Policy and Procedure

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## 1. Scope

- 1.01 This policy and procedure outlines NOCN's requirements for approved centres to obtain Direct Claims Status (DCS<sup>1</sup>) for a NOCN product.
- 1.02 This policy and procedure applies to:
- NOCN regulated qualifications, units and assessments.
  - NOCN non-regulated products including Endorsed Programmes and Assured Courses.
- 1.03 This policy and procedure does not apply to assessments which are externally set and assessed, such as NOCN's online knowledge tests or Functional Skills Reading, Writing and Maths examinations at Levels 1 and 2, which are exempt from being awarded DCS.
- 1.04 If a Centre is managed by a NOCN subsidiary or Delivery Partner, then the organisation will follow this policy and procedure on behalf of NOCN. Centres and learners who are affected by this should replace references to NOCN with the relevant subsidiary or Delivery Partner throughout this document.
- 1.05 The intended audience for this document is:
- NOCN Directors and Board of Trustees.
  - NOCN core, sub-contracted and associate staff, including External Quality Assurers (EQAs).
  - All staff in NOCN recognised and partner centres.
  - Qualification Regulators<sup>2</sup>.
  - Industry Regulators.

## 2. Purpose

- 2.01 The purpose of this document is to:
- Provide NOCN's requirements and criteria for centres to obtain DCS for a NOCN product.
  - Outline to centres the process for how DCS is approved for a NOCN product.
  - Support NOCN's processes for approving DCS.
  - Support centres' compliance with the NOCN Centre Agreement and Terms and Conditions.
  - Support NOCN's and centres' compliance with regulatory requirements.

## 3. Centre Responsibilities

- 3.01 Direct Claims Status is approved by NOCN on an individual product basis. It is only recommended and approved by NOCN where centres have been able to consistently demonstrate that they have a robust internal quality assurance system in place that ensures that their training and assessment of the product in question is compliant, safe, valid and reliable.
- 3.02 Centres must ensure that all staff involved in the management, assessment and quality assurance of NOCN products are fully aware of the contents of this policy. In particular, the

<sup>1</sup> **Definition:** Direct Claims Status (DCS) is a method of obtaining learner certification without the requirement of a NOCN EQA scrutinising the Centre's assessment decision and practices in relation to a learner's evidence of achievement. Instead, this scrutiny will take place following certification on a risk basis, in line with the NOCN Risk-Based Approach to Centre Quality Monitoring Policy and Procedure. DCS is approved by NOCN on an individual product basis.

<sup>2</sup> Ofqual in England; Qualifications Wales; CCEA Regulation in Northern Ireland or successor bodies

Centre should ensure that all concerned are aware of their responsibilities assumed under the Centre's Direct Claims Status.

- 3.03 Where DCS is in place, the Centre's quality lead (this may be a lead internal quality assurer or Quality Manager) will assume the responsibility of ensuring that the Centre's training, assessment and internal quality assurance of its NOCN provision is in line with NOCN's requirements and that the Centre continues to meet NOCN's criteria for DCS.
- 3.04 Centres must ensure that any changes to their quality system, including changes of personnel, are communicated to NOCN immediately, as this may affect the Centre's ability to retain their DCS approval for some or all their NOCN provision.
- 3.05 By claiming for the achievement of a learner through DCS, the Centre is providing the required assurances to NOCN that the required training, assessment and internal quality assurance processes for the learner have been completed to the required standard and are in line with the product's requirements.
- 3.06 To ensure that DCS approvals can be ratified during Centre monitoring activities, centres must ensure that all learner portfolios, records of assessment decisions and internal quality assurance activities are kept and stored in line with NOCN requirements, including those made through DCS. Centres must provide access to these records when requested to do so by their EQA. For further guidance regarding data retention, please refer to the NOCN Quality Assurance Manual.

#### 4. Criteria for Regulated Qualifications

- 4.01 To gain approval of DCS for a NOCN qualification, where the Centre does not have DCS with another Awarding Organisation, the following criteria must be met:
  - a) The Centre has delivered and has had completed learner assessments for the qualification (or one which is similar/comparable) for a minimum of six months. Alternatively, the Centre has had sufficient throughput to demonstrate consistency in the quality of their delivery, marking and internal quality assurance of learner assessments over a shorter period of time.
  - b) A satisfactory observation of training and assessment (including testing of knowledge and/or practical skills) has been conducted by a NOCN EQA in the vocational area of the qualification.
  - c) The Centre's internal quality assurance of the qualification has been externally quality assured by NOCN and was found to be satisfactory.
  - d) Where the qualification is assessed via a portfolio, five completed portfolios (across a spread of units) have been sampled by a NOCN EQA and were satisfactory upon first claiming of achievement.
  - e) The qualification/vocational area has not been placed on a Level 2 Sanction for non-compliance by NOCN in the previous 6 months.
  - f) The Centre has not been placed on a Level 3 Sanction for non-compliance by NOCN across any provision in the previous 6 months.
  - g) Satisfactory standardisation arrangements are in place.
  - h) The Centre must have appropriately experienced and qualified delivery staff in place (Tutors, Assessors and Internal Quality Assurers), for the individual qualification being considered for DCS, in line with the staffing requirements detailed within the individual qualification specification.

4.02 For centres who deliver NOCN qualifications internationally, where an observation of assessment and IQA practice conducted by an EQA is not possible, NOCN will consider applying DCS without this. In these circumstances, the EQA will seek to review other sources of evidence to allow them to make an informed decision regarding the application of DCS, such as video evidence of training/assessment or discussions with staff and learners. This will be at the discretion of the EQA who will review the Centre's individual circumstances and the types of evidence available. In all cases, NOCN will require a minimum of ten completed portfolios, rather than five, to have been sampled by a NOCN EQA and for them to be satisfactory upon first claiming of achievement.

## 5. Criteria for NOCN-Regulated Provision

5.01 NOCN also allows centres to be approved for DCS for its non-regulated provision. This includes Endorsed Programmes, Assured Courses and International Qualifications. For the majority of Endorsed Programmes and Assured Courses, NOCN will grant DCS automatically upon approval. This will be confirmed to the Centre at the approval stage.

5.02 In applying or recommending the continuation of DCS for non-regulated provision, the EQA will review the Centre's management systems, delivery staff, resources and equipment to determine if DCS is appropriate.

## 6. Procedure

6.01 There are three routes to achieve Direct Claims Status for a NOCN product:

- a) EQA recommendation of DCS approval, where all DCS requirements have been met.
- b) Recommendation of DCS approval provided by an EQA following a Centre requested Direct Claims Status Review.
- c) Transfer from another Awarding Organisation (Regulated Qualifications only).

6.02 In all cases, where all DCS criteria have been met and the decision is made to approve DCS to some or all the Centre's provision, correspondence from the Quality Assurance Team will be sent to the Centre's Quality Assurance Contact, to confirm to the Centre which products they now have DCS for.

### I. EQA Recommendation

6.03 During a Centre monitoring activity (i.e., Centre visit, remote visit or remote sample), the EQA will audit the Centre against NOCN's Approval Criteria (as outlined in the NOCN Quality Assurance Manual) and the criteria for DCS to be approved for a NOCN product (as outlined earlier in this policy).

6.04 If the EQA determines that the Centre has met the DCS criteria, on completion of the Centre monitoring activity, the EQA will confirm their recommendation of DCS verbally to the Centre. The EQA will put forward their recommendation to the Quality Assurance Team in writing on the relevant NOCN External Quality Assurance Report.

6.05 In some cases, DCS may be recommended by an EQA outside of a monitoring activity, such as in cases where a Centre gains approval for a qualification where they already hold DCS for that qualification at a higher level. In these cases, the EQA can recommend the approval of DCS where the criteria have been met without the need for a monitoring activity to take place.

6.06 Following ratification by the Quality Assurance Team, DCS will be approved and applied to the relevant NOCN products in the Centre's provision.

## **II. Successful outcome of a Direct Claims Status Review**

6.07 If a Centre is not due a scheduled Centre monitoring activity, but they believe that they meet the criteria for DCS for some or all their NOCN provision, they can request a Direct Claims Status Review from the Quality Assurance Team. The Centre is required to pay the additional visit charge for this to take place, as detailed in the NOCN Fees and Charges, available on the NOCN website.

6.08 The format of a Direct Claims Status Review will be similar to that of a regular Centre monitoring activity, with a specific focus by the EQA on reviewing the Centre's appropriateness to be approved for DCS for some or all their NOCN provision. Following the request of a Direct Claims Status Review, the Centre's EQA will contact the Centre to discuss requirements for the review and to discuss monitoring arrangements. Dependent on the criteria that the EQA is required to review will depend on the required format of the monitoring (i.e., whether this can take place remotely or whether it is required to be a Centre visit).

6.09 If, on the completion of the review, the Centre meets DCS criteria, the EQA will confirm their recommendation of DCS verbally to the Centre. The EQA will put forward their recommendation to the Quality Assurance Team in writing on the relevant NOCN External Quality Assurance Report.

6.10 Following ratification by the Quality Assurance Team, DCS will be approved and applied to the relevant NOCN products in the Centre's provision.

6.11 Where the EQA has deemed that DCS requirements have not been met, they will provide the Centre with recommendations, which will outline what actions should be taken to allow the Centre to meet the criteria in the future. DCS approval will then be reviewed on subsequent Centre monitoring activities.

## **III. Transfer from another Awarding Organisation (Regulated Qualifications Only)**

6.12 If a Centre currently holds DCS for a qualification with another Awarding Organisation (AO), NOCN will consider transferring DCS to the Centre's equivalent or similar NOCN provision, if this exists.

6.13 To allow DCS to transfer from another AO to a NOCN qualification:

- a) The Centre must have received two satisfactory EQA reports for the qualification in the last two years by the other AO.
- b) The qualification must be comparable to a NOCN qualification (i.e., if the Centre had DCS for an ESOL qualification, this would not permit them to have DCS with NOCN for a construction qualification).
- c) An appropriately experienced and qualified IQA must be in place at the Centre for the qualifications where DCS approval is being requested, in line with the individual qualification specification(s).
- d) The Centre must have appropriately qualified and experienced Tutors and Assessors (where applicable) in place for the qualifications where DCS approval is being requested, in line with the individual qualification specification(s).
- e) The Centre must have satisfactory Centre standardisation arrangements in place.
- f) A review of Centre information available to the NOCN Quality Assurance Team does not highlight any risks to the integrity of NOCN qualifications.

- 6.14 Centres wishing to transfer DCS from another AO to some or all their NOCN provision should contact the Quality Assurance Team, who will conduct a desktop review to determine whether DCS can be approved. The decision will be at the Quality Assurance Team's discretion.
- 6.15 If it is deemed that DCS can be approved, the Quality Assurance Team will apply DCS to the Centre's relevant NOCN qualifications. The Quality Assurance Team will schedule a Centre monitoring activity, at no extra charge to the Centre, within the first two months of their delivery of the qualification to ensure that the Centre is continuing to meet DCS requirements.

## 7. Monitoring of DCS

- 7.01 Once approved, DCS is continuously monitored by the Quality Assurance Team and the Centre's allocated EQA. To maintain DCS, centres must continue to work to the required standards of delivery, including working in line with the NOCN Approval Criteria. The NOCN Quality Assurance Team will schedule a review of a Centre's DCS approvals whenever information is received to indicate that DCS requirements are not being met, or that the quality system in the Centre has undergone change.
- 7.02 If at any point a Centre finds that it no longer meets DCS requirements, or if incorrect claims are made where DCS is in place, then the Centre must inform the Quality Assurance Team immediately. Failure to notify NOCN may result in Sanctions being applied to the Centre. For further information, please refer to the NOCN Risk-Based Approach to Quality Monitoring Policy and Procedure.

### I. Removal of DCS

- 7.03 If, at any stage, a Centre no longer meets DCS requirements for some or all of its provision, NOCN will remove the Centre's DCS for all of the affected qualifications. Centres will be notified of the removal/suspension of DCS for a NOCN qualification either from an External Quality Assurance Report following a Centre monitoring activity or via correspondence from the Quality Assurance Team.

## 8. Appeals

- 8.01 Centres who wish to appeal to NOCN against a decision made regarding DCS should refer to the NOCN Appeals Policy and Procedure.

## 9. Document Control

- 9.01 This policy is maintained by the Quality Assurance Team and will be reviewed and updated where necessary to reflect updated legislation, customer feedback, improvements of operation and changes to the regulatory environment. If you have any queries regarding the contents or the use of this policy, please contact the Quality Assurance Team directly on [assurance@nocn.org.uk](mailto:assurance@nocn.org.uk).
- 9.02 All NOCN policies and procedures are signed off by the NOCN Responsible Officer. The latest versions of which can be found on our website here: <https://www.nocn.org.uk/support/nocn-group-policies/>