

External moderation guidance

Background

External moderation is an important element of the adults national system of quality assurance incorporated in the Knowledge and Skills Statement for Social Workers in Adult Services 2015 (now known as the Post-Qualifying Standards).

In 2015 Skills for Care gathered employer views on models for the national system of external moderation. It was considered that two tiers of external moderation would provide an acceptable level of scrutiny and be practical to administer and support:

- a national moderation panel (NMP) and
- partnership moderation.

The purpose of this national quality assurance system is to give the profession confidence that employers' judgements are consistent across the country.

In the 2022 refresh of the quality assurance framework of the Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE), which was a collaborative project with employers, it was decided that the NMP would be subsumed within a new body, the national quality assurance panel (NQAP).

ASYE partnerships

Every employer providing an adults' ASYE programme is required to be a member of and participate in, partnership moderation. The partnership moderation process will provide peer review, support, challenge and scrutiny of ASYE employer judgements in order to promote consistency and to identify and encourage the adoption of good practice.

Many ASYE partnerships now embrace both adult ASYE and child and family ASYE. This has happened organically and at the choice of participant organisations. Whereas adults' ASYE employers are required to be a member of and participate in partnership moderation, this is not the case for child and family ASYE employers.

An ASYE partnership will:

- Comprise at least three employers, two of whom support at least two NQSWs through ASYE every year and receive funding from Skills for Care. Where the circumstances of a local partnership area make this problematic over a temporary period, the partnership chair should seek guidance from Skills for Care as to the appropriate way forward.
- The involvement of at least one higher education institution (HEI) in the partnership is desirable and HEIs can be members of more than one partnership.

The ASYE partnership may be a component of a wider social work education partnership.

- Offer support to the private and voluntary sector through promoting and enabling participation in partnership activities and sharing information.
- Have a current and regularly reviewed memorandum of collaboration (MoC) which is signed by senior leaders within organisations whose areas of responsibility includes social work, outlines governance arrangements, membership, frequency of meetings and parts played by senior managers. Principal social workers are expected to assume key roles in external moderation. Guidance on the content of MoC is on the ASYE webpages of our website.

Partnership moderation standards

1. Partnership moderation process

The purpose of partnership moderation is to scrutinise:

1. the ASYE final assessment judgements and
2. the ASYE support and assessment process.

The process will consider whether employer assessments against the Post-Qualifying Standards (also known as the KSS) and the Professional Capabilities Framework are accurate (i.e. consistent with these standards), valid, robust and sufficient. Partnership moderation will not overturn an employer's final assessment judgement.

Every adults' ASYE employer is required to participate in partnership moderation. They should ensure that their representatives are able to attend partnership moderation meetings and have the capability and capacity to undertake any related activities, e.g. reading reports and providing feedback.

2. Management and membership

ASYE partnerships should elect a chair, who should be a registered social worker, and agree the level of representation. Each partnership moderation process should include at least three members including a representative from each employer submitting evidence to the panel. A higher education institution (HEI) representative attending the panel is desirable.

When developing an agenda for each meeting, the panel should consider including:

- an update from partner organisations on the actions identified by the panel at the previous meeting to improve the consistency of newly qualified social workers' (NQSWs') support, assessment and outcomes. If an action, by its nature, requires an urgent response, the panel should agree a timeframe for verbally or in writing responding to the chair
- an activity aimed at improving the consistency between reviewers in their assessment of the evidence of progression.

Representatives should normally be registered social workers, working at the advanced level of the Professional Capabilities Framework and able to demonstrate professional educator capabilities. If the ASYE lead for an organisation is not a

registered social worker then they should nominate a registered social worker within the organisation to review evidence submitted to the moderation panel.

The partnership must address confidentiality issues, for example a confidentiality agreement can be signed by all members.

Timing and frequency of meetings

The ASYE partnership will consider how often they need to meet in order to fulfil their role of scrutiny, challenge and review although it must be undertaken at least once per year. The frequency and timing of the process will depend on the number of NQSWs within the partnership and their journey through ASYE.

3. Random sampling and reviewing

Partnership moderation should include random sampling of at least 10% over a 12 month period, or no fewer than four NQSW sets of evidence within the partnership. The partnership moderation process must review all fails and marginal submissions and in addition, a 10% random sample of average and good submissions. Each member of the partnership moderation process should read at least two sets of evidence.

When an organisation submits a portfolio to the panel, it should be accompanied by a copy of the internal panel minutes for the portfolio.

4. Reporting and feedback

Common templates/checklists should be used to guide the reviewers and a summary report completed to make sure that information about quality and themes can be collated and sent to individual employers and assessors for their consideration.

On request by Skills for Care, a partnership moderation panel is required to submit their most recent external summary report(s). This request is likely to coincide with a portfolio from one of the organisations in the partnership being moderated by the national quality assurance panel.

5. Confidentiality

The memorandum of collaboration should set out the framework for governing the obligation of confidentiality of the partnership moderation. For example, it may require each partnership representative to sign a confidentiality statement in a format agreed by the partnership moderation.

Additional guidance for partnerships

The moderation process

a. Random sampling methods and scenarios

Employers will need to group their sets of evidence into the following categories:

- fails and marginal submissions
- average and good submissions.

All fails and marginal sets of evidence must be submitted for external moderation. A random sample of at least 10% of the average and good submissions should also be submitted for moderation by the partnership.

Random sampling can be performed in different ways according to the size of the partnership and the start dates of NQSWs undertaking ASYE, but it needs to be undertaken in accordance with the spirit of this guidance. The intention is that the external moderation process reviews and scrutinises a random selection of evidence in order to gain a realistic and representative overview of assessment standards.

Partnerships where employers have a significant number of NQSWs undertaking the ASYE can agree that each employer gives a code or a number to each NQSW's evidence set within each category. They would then randomly select 10% from each category using a random number generator or similar tool (see below) to determine the sets of evidence presented to the partnership. This approach may not be feasible for partnerships whose members have a small number of NQSWs or only one. In this case they may need to moderate a greater percentage to ensure that they have good representation across the partnership.

b. Grouping sets of evidence

The partnership moderation process must review all fails and marginal submissions and, in addition, a 10% random sample of average and good submissions.

The term 'marginal' is used to define sets of evidence for moderation purposes, it is not an assessment category. A final ASYE assessment judgement can only be pass or fail. However, in order to uphold standards and promote consistency of assessment, it is particularly important to scrutinise 'marginal submissions' where an assessor and/or an employer have needed to make very fine judgements in relation to the ASYE standard and 'good enough' evidence. A marginal submission is defined as:

1. Those assessments where the assessor and the reviewer agree that the evidence of capability is provided but it only just reaches the standard. This should be apparent in the assessor reports where the assessor is qualifying their decision and acknowledging there are development needs, but the baseline standard has been met.
2. Any assessments where the reviewer questions the assessor decision in relation to whether the standard has been met
3. Assessments where the reviewer questions the capability/authenticity/validity of the assessor reporting within the documentation.

The feedback given to employers presenting marginal submissions for partnership moderation should be clear and constructive.

Appendix 1: Random sampling scenarios

Scenario 1: Large partnership of four employers and 131 NQSWs

Employer	Total number of NQSWs on ASYE	Number of fails and marginals	Number of good submissions and number to be moderated (in red)	Number of average submissions and number to be moderated (in red)	Grand Total
Employer 1	80	5	35 (4)	40 (4)	13
Employer 2	40	2	15 (2)	23 (2)	6
Employer 3	10	1	3 (1)	6 (1)	3
Employer 4	1	0	1 (1)	0	1
Total for moderation		8	8	7	23

NB: Partnership can decide to read sets of evidence (RoSPA and the NQSW's evidence of progression) fully or selectively. Random number generator can be used to select sample see <https://www.random.org/integers/>

Scenario 2: Small partnership of two local authorities and two private/voluntary/independent (PVI) partners

12 NQSWs per year (6 and 5 from LAs, 1 from one PVI partner):

(Moderation minimum requirements – 4 sets of evidence)

Review any marginal and fail, randomly select others to make a total of at least 4

Minimum number for partnership review - 4

Probably one partnership moderation process per year.

NB: There should be at least three participants in the partnership moderation process, each organisation submitting evidence should be represented. It is recommended that all reviewers of the ASYE assessment evidence are registered social workers.

Supporting the development of external panel moderators

To support the development and consistency of moderators in their decision-making, partnership moderation panels should consider the following:

- an induction for new moderators
- before becoming a moderator, the opportunity to discuss with an experienced moderator their review and decision-making processes. This could happen within the context of observing an internal moderation panel
- the opportunity to observe an external moderation panel and ask questions about the reviewing process

- an opportunity for all panel members to review one or more pieces of evidence and discuss their evaluation of the evidence,
- whether moderators would benefit from regular activity focused on supporting the consistency of their evaluation of the evidence.