

BTEC Quality Assurance Handbook 2011-12

6c. NVQ/SVQ Standards Verification

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External quality assurance for NVQ/SVQs

We will externally assure quality for NVQ/SVQs using two main processes:

- An annual centre visit for Quality Review & Development, covering all programmes
- Annual centre visits for Standards Verification for each programme, or group of programmes

For further information on Quality Review & Development, please refer to the relevant chapter of this handbook.

What is standards verification for NVQ/SVQs?

- Standards Verification is the way in which we check that centres are operating quality assurance and assessing to the right standards
- Standards Verifiers will provide advice and information and work with you to support you in demonstrating that you are working to the standards and addressing areas of weakness,
- It ensures that you have accurate assessment records and are assessing candidates appropriately, consistently and fairly
- Where you register on an Apprenticeship basis, verification will be coordinated across components whenever feasible
- There will normally be one visit each year for programmes in a sector

Which qualifications does NVQ/SVQ standards verification cover?

- Edexcel NVQ and competence-based qualifications
- Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQs) accredited by SQA

Note: If you are offering NVQ/SVQs within BTEC Apprenticeship framework, Standards Verification for NVQ/SVQs will be integrated with verification of the other components in the BTEC Apprenticeship framework. Please refer to the chapter on BTEC Apprenticeships for further detail.

Which centres are involved?

- All UK centres delivering NVQ/SVQs and competence-based qualifications
- UK centres delivering BTEC Apprenticeship Frameworks

Roles and responsibilities

Edexcel

Standards Verifier

We will appoint Standards Verifiers to cover one or more sectors; they will be occupationally competent for the NVQ/SVQs they cover. We will tell you who your Standards Verifier is in October. If you are a new centre, or, if you offer NVQ/SVQs in a new sector, we will tell you 4 to 6 weeks after you first register learners. Standards Verifiers for NVQ/SVQs will normally visit once during a calendar year.

The primary focus of the Standards Verifier is to ensure that staff involved in the planning, delivery and assessment of qualifications:

- maintain the national standard of qualifications awarded by Edexcel
- assess learner performance in accordance with national standards and evidence requirements
- maintain a robust mechanism for the internal verification of NVQ/SVQ programmes
- have a clear commitment to assuring and improving quality

The Standards Verifier will:

- undertake a visit, normally annually unless you have a different arrangement with us
- sample and review learners' portfolios, assessment records and internal verification records
- verify that the National Occupational Standards for assessment, internal verification and for the occupational sector are met
- provide advice, support and guidance to the centre on best practice for implementation of assessment and internal verification and for the achievement of the National Occupational Standards for the occupational sector
- recommend certification or otherwise for the respective occupational sectors

Senior Standards Verifier

We have a Senior Standards Verifier who takes an overview of standards within a sector and ensures that all Standards Verifiers have appropriate standardisation. The Senior Standards Verifier may be asked to become involved with a centre at the request of Edexcel.

Regional Quality Manager

Your centre has a designated Regional Quality Manager. They have a responsibility for centres within a geographical area and provide quality assurance support and guidance for anyone managing or delivering BTECs and NVQ/SVQs.

For NVQ/SVQ standards verification, the Regional Quality Managers will:

- support you at all stages of the process
- support you in the resolution of actions and recommendations as required

Your Regional Quality Manager may become directly involved if a certification or registration block is imposed and will work with you to address the issues. A UK Map with Regional Quality Manager contact details can be found here: www.edexcel.com/quals/BTEC/support

Centres

Quality Nominee

You will appoint a member of staff as to act as the main point of contact between Edexcel and your centre. Your Quality Nominee should ensure the effective management of BTEC programmes and actively encourage and promote good practice. You **must** keep the Quality Nominee details up to date on Edexcel Online.

For NVQ/SVQ standards verification, your Quality Nominee will:

- be the initial point of contact for the Standards Verifier
- liaise with appropriate practitioners and internal verifiers to ensure that Standards Verifiers are able to carry out their role

Programme managers/Internal Verifiers

A programme manager or programme leader is the person responsible for day-to-day management and delivery of the programme. For Edexcel NVQ/SVQ programmes, the Programme Leader may also act as the Lead Internal Verifier.

As the programme manager, you will:

- liaise with the Quality Nominee to obtain the details of the Standards Verifier and to provide information in preparation for the visit
- prepare for the standards verification visit, providing any information that the Standards Verifier needs and agreeing a visit plan
- provide information during the visit, including evidence related to learners' portfolios, assessment, internal verification and quality assurance
- receive feedback at the end of the visit
- receive the report of the visit via Edexcel Online and take actions when required

Internal Verifiers can be anyone involved in the delivery and assessment of the programme. You cannot internally verify your own assessment. Where there is a team of assessors, it is good practice for all assessors to be involved in internally verifying each other.

In order to ensure that assessment is being carried out consistently and that National Occupational Standards are being met, assessors should take part in standardisation meetings. If there is one main person responsible for delivery and assessment, then another person will need to be identified to undertake internal verification.

As an Internal Verifier, you will:

- ensure an effective system of recording learner achievement is in place
- develop an internal verification strategy and form an internal verification plan to implement this strategy

- keep accurate and up-to-date records of the internal verification process
- advise assessors on the appropriateness of assessment evidence with regard to level, sufficiency, authenticity, validity and consistency
- use your subject specialism to sample assessments to verify assessors' judgements, ensuring that they are consistent, fair and reliable
- ensure your own assessment decisions are sampled when teaching on the programme
- ensure that appropriate corrective action is taken where necessary
- take part in the formal stages of any appeal

Where several NVQ/SVQs are delivered, it is good practice to ensure that there is coordination across the whole centre. This could be undertaken by a programme manager an Internal Verifier or the Quality Nominee. This helps us to communicate with you and helps you to co-ordinate any actions needed following Standards Verifier visit.

Support

Comprehensive information and support material is available on the NVQ/SVQ pages at www.edexcel.com. This includes:

- Edexcel NVQ/SVQ Guidance for Centres
- Edexcel NVQ/SVQ Guidance for Learners
- profiles for a wide range of NVQ/SVQs including accreditation information, expiry dates, occupational competence requirements for assessors and verifiers, etc.
- links to other useful NVQ/SVQ sites
- details of new publications that have become available after the Edexcel publications catalogue has been published
- a full NVQ/SVQ Accreditation listing and update

Standards Verifiers and Internal Verifiers should be familiar with the websites and publications for the appropriate Standards Setting Body and any other relevant industry organisation.

NVQ/SVQ centres and Standards Verifiers should ensure they have copies of the following:

- A full set of the relevant occupational standards (usually available from the Standards Setting Body and/or on the Edexcel website, where we have permission to publish them)
- The assessment strategy and evidence requirements for each NVQ/SVQ. These can be found in the Edexcel centre guidance
- Joint Awarding Body (JAB) Guidance on Internal Verification (available as a download from the Edexcel website)

Training

We support centres by providing NVQ/SVQ-specific training events, such as:

- making the most of NVQ/SVQ assessment
- effective assessment practice for NVQ/SVQs

- using alternative assessment methods
- IT solutions for NVQ/SVQ evidence capture
- the internal verification role and quality assurance for NVQ/SVQs

We also provide customised training and support through **Training from Edexcel** at www.edexcel.com/training

For employers and training providers, the Work Based Learning Solutions Team can provide dedicated support. Please contact salesupport@edexcel.com.

The standards verification process

We allocate a Standards Verifier:

- to those centres that have registered learners
- and notify you by email to your Quality Nominee who acts as our point of contact
- to those specific programmes which they are occupationally competent to verify

You normally receive one visit each year. The annual cycle starts on **1st September** and finishes on **31st July**. We may change the frequency of Standards Verifier visits to support or respond to an urgent issue. Additional visits are not permitted without consent from Edexcel. Please make any requests for additional visits or remote sampling to your allocated Standards Verifier, who will contact Edexcel on your behalf. Please note that you may be charged a fee for additional visits.

- You must register learners promptly (normally within one month of enrolment and as advised in the Edexcel Information Manual) so that you receive guidance and support from the Standards Verifier as early as possible within the programme cycle
- Standards Verifiers can only visit centres to look at programmes with registrations, so you should check registrations carefully when making arrangements
- You must ensure that information regarding learners is accurate and up to date so that we can provide appropriate support and ensure compliance with regulatory requirements
- If you cancel a pre-arranged visit at short notice, you must have a legitimate reason. We may withhold any claims for certification until a verification visit has been completed
- We reserve the right to charge for visits that have been cancelled at short notice

The Standards Verifier will:

- agree a Visit Requirements Plan with the programme manager
- agree a schedule for the visit which will normally include reviewing Internal Verification plans, reports and records, assessment records and validating assessment judgements through sampling learner portfolios and evidence
- review the internal quality assurance for the qualification – checking the Internal Verification sampling strategy, Internal Verifier records and feedback to assessors
- review the occupational competence and qualifications including the Assessment and Quality Assurance qualifications of the centre team, including professional development plans for assessors and Internal Verifiers

- ensure that centre staff have all the necessary current documentation
- check assessment practice against the requirements of the overarching assessment strategy and validate the quality and consistency of assessors' judgements against national standards through sampling assessment decisions at interim and final stages
- inform the programme manager promptly of any areas of weakness and agree an action plan for improvement
- provide positive feedback and encouragement when good practice is identified
- make full use of retrospective sampling where necessary. You should retain portfolios for all candidates certificated between verification visits in order to allow the Standards Verifier to undertake retrospective sampling
- recommend access to certification or actions to be undertaken by the centre, as appropriate
- where necessary, recommend limitation or suspension of certification, or suspension of registration

Exceptionally, if we consider that a centre is low risk because it has a good quality history then it is possible to arrange for verification of programmes to be conducted remotely. The Standards Verifier can verify a sample of learner evidence, reviewing assessor and Internal Verifier's records and possibly contacting learners.

For remote standards verification:

- the Standards Verifier agrees the units, learners, portfolios and other related records required in the sample and confirms arrangements with you in writing
- you should never send original evidence or records unless specifically required

First visit for newly-approved programmes

The Standards Verifier's first visit to a newly approved programme will include a review of the recognition and approval criteria to confirm that you are meeting the requirements.

The programme manager or Internal Verifier should have a copy of the recognition and approvals submissions available for the Standards Verifier. Where serious discrepancies between the submissions and current practice are found at the visit, the Standards Verifier will notify us.

Arranging the visit and the visit schedule

The Standards Verifier will first check with you which programmes are running and whether there are learners registered. Standards Verifiers are not usually allowed to visit centres to look at programmes without registrations unless given prior permission from us.

The Standards Verifier will then agree with you a date for the visit and timings for key activities. The date of this visit should be appropriate for when learners require certification. You should not ask the Standards Verifier to make the visit after July. The Standards Verifier will send you a Visit Requirements Plan setting out what you have agreed.

You should structure activities so that the best use is made of Standards Verifier time. The visit must be of sufficient duration for the Standards Verifier to complete all necessary verification

activities in order to make recommendations on certification. We would expect a typical visit to take at least four hours.

The visit should include time to cover the:

- programmes to be verified
- internal verification plans and their implementation
- assessors and Internal Verifiers to be seen
- evidence to be made available on the day, or in advance
- follow up of action points from previous reports
- observation of assessment practice
- sampling of learner work
- named sites to be visited, where provision is dispersed
- review of the assessment strategy requirements and their implementation
- feedback to the Internal Verifier/programme manager and, in some cases, the assessment team

In some cases it may not be practical for the Standards Verifier to complete their report during their visit, but it is important that the main action points are agreed with you during the visit.

Pre-visit information for newly appointed Standards Verifiers

If the Standards Verifier is newly appointed to the centre, they may ask to see the following material before finalising the visit plan, so that they can familiarise themselves with the organisation and highlight any matters for discussion. This information may include:

- a list of designated assessors and IVs for each programme
- CVs and authenticated copies of D units or A and V awards for assessors and Internal Verifiers
- registered learners for each programme (and their locations if provision is dispersed)
- details of the assessment methods used
- records of learners certificated since the last standards verification visit

Preparing for the visit

You need to prepare for the Standards Verifier visit so that best use is made of the time available for both your centre and for Edexcel. For each visit, you should have ready the following information:

For learners:

- Start date, registration date and number, NVQ/SVQ programme/level
- Initial assessment, including learning needs and Recognition of Prior Learning
- Workplace location, including details of supervisor/manager/mentor
- Assessor allocation
- Progress review dates, including latest action agreed

- Records of assessments and summative decisions
- Unit progress and completion

For assessors:

- Up to date CVs, relevant to the programmes assessed
- Assessment qualification certificates or validated copies of the originals
- Personal development plans for assessors showing professional updating/development on a rolling basis
- Learner workload including assessment sites (if provision is dispersed)
- Records of monitoring assessor performance including feedback
- Specimen signatures of assessors

For Internal Verifiers:

- Up to date CVs, relevant to the programmes assessed
- Quality Assurance qualification certificates or validated copies of the originals
- Personal development plans as Internal Verifiers, showing ongoing professional updating/development
- Assessor locations
- Learner locations
- Records of monitoring assessor performance including feedback
- Specimen signatures of Internal Verifiers

For the programme:

- The current version of the Quality Assurance Handbook
- Internal verification sampling strategy, including proposed and actual sampling
- Monitoring of assessment practice records and feedback
- Sampling of assessment decisions and feedback
- The previous Standards Verification report
- Certification claims for current learners and those made since the last visit
- Records of assessor meetings and standardisation activities
- Records of internal verification meetings, where there is more than one Internal Verifier
- Specimen signatures of any "expert witnesses", validated by the Internal Verifier
- Appeals/complaints/malpractice records relevant to NVQ/SVQs
- Equal opportunities policy
- Health and safety policy and procedures, including monitoring of placement sites

Much of the above is sensitive information and should be held securely and restricted to named personnel. Where information is stored electronically, access to the system should be password protected and accessible only to those authorised to make amendments. It should be kept up to date, preferably by a named officer, and be easily retrievable. You must keep centre records for three years for audit purposes. This includes all learner records, internal verification and assessment reports. If you have learners who have withdrawn from the programme, then you should promptly withdraw their registration through Edexcel Online.

The visit

The visit should follow the agreed schedule and enable the Standards Verifier to make a decision whether or not to recommend certification and Direct Claims Status. The Standards Verifier will make decisions based on the centre recognition criteria and the Edexcel requirements for the delivery of assessment on the report.

As the Internal Verifier, you have responsibility to provide evidence to demonstrate that these requirements are being met. Where there is more than one Internal Verifier on a programme, one should adopt the senior or co-ordinating IV role and take responsibility for managing the programme information.

The Standards Verifier will review:

- resources
- learner support specific to the NVQ/SVQ
- assessment and verification
- centre records

At the end of the visit the Standards Verifier will discuss the conclusions and agree an action plan with you. If the Standards Verifier decides that assessment criteria and requirements have not been met, in the report will identify:

- directed actions
- limitation to or, suspension of certification
- in exceptional circumstances, suspension of registration

Internal quality assurance

You must provide copies of all Internal Verification:

- sampling plans
- sampling records, including feedback to assessors
- records of monitoring assessment practice, including feedback to assessors

The Standards Verifier will normally start by reviewing the quality of internal verification to see that it is rigorous and robust.

The Standards Verifier needs to be sure that all Internal Verifiers:

- understand centre systems and procedures
- are knowledgeable about the standards and sector assessment requirements/strategy
- are knowledgeable about the learners
- understand their own role in quality assurance

Sampling learner evidence

The sampling of learners is central to standards verification. The Standards Verifier will sample learner work at every visit to confer or confirm direct claim status. You must make learner work

available for sampling at each visit. If you do not make learner work available when requested, the Standards Verifier report will identify actions. If no work is sampled for a programme then certification cannot usually be allowed.

Sampling of learner evidence:

- will be carefully planned to ensure that the Standards Verifier can reach a judgement on standards
- should include formative (interim) and summative (final) stages, particularly for new centres or inexperienced teams and where qualifications have changed
- may be portfolio based or in alternative formats, for example work place evidence, video, CD/DVD, audio tape, e-portfolio
- will include the support and guidance offered to learners

There is no prescribed size of sample and the selection of the sample for each centre will vary according to the needs of the centre and the particular NVQ/SVQ. Standards Verifiers will ensure that they can select independently some of the learners who are sampled to ensure the validity of the sampling process.

The Standards Verifier will select their sample based on:

- reliability (to be sure sufficient work and assessors have been seen)
- different assessment methods
- assessors/IVs - number, experience, workload and location
- number of assessment sites and satellites
- learner range, for example full-time/part-time, different employers
- introduction of new/revised NVQ/SVQs or additional units
- all units and, in particular, any problem units
- inclusion of verified and non-verified assessment decisions
- opportunities to access assessment
- any special requirements of the assessment strategy

The Standards Verifier will require a quiet space to work in order to review the sample. As the Internal Verifier, you should be available to answer questions but also allow the Standards Verifier time to complete sampling without interruption.

Meeting the team

The Standards Verifier will meet with staff from the assessment and verification team to discuss and advice on assessment issues and practices.

The Standards Verifier will check details such as:

- learner start dates
- unit achievement
- assessment and verification dates

The Standards Verifier will want to see evidence that all assessors and Internal Verifiers meet the occupational competence requirements for the NVQ/SVQs they are assessing/verifying. These are usually set out in the sector assessment requirements/strategy. In some sectors (e.g. hairdressing) this is specified in detail. In others, the requirement to maintain occupational competence is implied rather than explicit.

The Standards Verifier will also want to see evidence of professional development and updating within the assessment team. Your centre should review and agree personal development plans with staff, which will support them in their roles. If you have staff based primarily in education and training, who are no longer actively working in the sector in which they are assessing and verifying, you need to consider how their occupational competence remains current.

The Standards Verifier will check the qualifications for assessors and verifiers. Where assessors or Internal Verifiers have been qualified for some time, and have D unit accreditation or A and V awards, it is a requirement that they operate to the new standards for Assessment and Quality Assurance. This does not mean that they need to achieve the new awards, but an updating session should be held to ensure an understanding of the new requirements, particularly with regard to assessment requirements/strategies and independent assessment. Please see the **Assessing and Assuring the Quality of Assessment** pages on the Edexcel website: www.edexcel.com/quals/NVQ/SVQ-competence-based-qcf/aaq.

The Standards Verifier will want to meet with assessors and learners to discuss the implementation of the programme. Also, they will try to witness assessment practice by observing assessment taking place.

A crucial part of the Standards Verifier's role is to advise and support centres. The visit should allow time to discuss concerns or to answer queries. Where issues are outside the Standards Verifier's remit or experience they will obtain the relevant information directly (and respond by phone or email) or refer you to the appropriate person/department at Edexcel.

Conclusion of the visit

The Standards Verifier will discuss the findings of the visit with you at the end of the visit and advise on actions for improvement. Any action points will be directly related to the non-compliance with the relevant centre recognition criteria and our requirements for the delivery of assessment indicated on the report.

It is important that the actions and target dates agreed are clear and realistic, since failure to complete the actions within the timeframe will lead to limitation or suspension of certification or suspension of registration. As the Internal Verifier, you need to understand any required actions and clarify any issues before the end of the visit.

Accessing the electronic report

Once the electronic report form (e-QRF) has been submitted, your Quality Nominee will receive an automatic email alert and you can access your report through Edexcel Online. If not already a user of Edexcel Online, please ask your Exams Officer to set you up with access.

- The e-QRF shows whether each centre recognition and approvals indicator continues to be **fully met** (i.e. consistently throughout), or **not met**. Where evidence has not been seen, an

explanation must be given. For example, if requested information is not available either before, or at the visit, then the indicator will be marked as “No”

- When an indicator is marked as “No”, the comments box in the appropriate section will be used by the Standards Verifier to explain the reason
- Any indicator marked as “No” will trigger an action point
- The e-QRF will also identify any significant failings in the delivery of programmes where these exist. For example the assessment process is found to disadvantage learners, then the indicator will be marked “Yes”
- When one of these indicators is marked as “Yes”, the comments box in the appropriate section will be used by the Standards Verifier to explain the reason
- Any of these indicators marked “Yes” will result in limitation or suspension of certification or suspension of registration

Maintaining the integrity of Edexcel NVQ/SVQs

Standards Verifiers will provide support, advice and guidance to centres to achieve Direct Claim Status. At each visit Direct Claim Status is reviewed.

Where the Standards Verifier identifies quality issues in the delivery of programmes, we will exercise the right to:

- direct you take actions
- limit or suspend certification
- suspend registration

The Standards Verifier will inform you as the Internal Verifier/programme manager that they intend to recommend suspension of certification or suspension of registration and explain the next steps.

The Standards Verifier makes the recommendation through the e-QRF. The recommendations for suspension of certification or suspension of registration will be checked by the Senior Standards Verifier for the sector, once the e-QRF is submitted to us. The e-QRF is not available to you when suspension of certification or suspension of registration is recommended until the circumstances have been reviewed by the Senior Standards Verifier.

If a suspension of certification or registration is confirmed:

- We will inform you directly and provide you will access to the e-QRF
- We will work with you to address the issues
- If additional training is required, we will aim to secure appropriate expertise to provide this
- A charge may be made for consultancy visits arising from a quality issue

For informal advice or guidance about the centre recognition criteria and the Edexcel requirements for the delivery of assessment, please contact our Quality Standards team: qualitystandards@edexcel.com.

Claiming certificates as a result of verification

The Standards Verifier will recommend whether to allow Direct Claims Status or limited certification. Certificates for all newly approved programmes are automatically blocked until the Standards Verifier is satisfied that national standards are being consistently met and that internal quality assurance is robust.

Indicating “Yes” to Direct Claims Status on the e-QRF enables you to claim a full NVQ/SVQ certificate or unit certificates between standards verification visits. Direct Claims Status can be stopped through the Standards Verifier reporting a “No” on the e-QRF. In exceptional circumstances, we may stop it directly.

In some situations, for example where learner evidence meets national standards but this has not been demonstrated consistently over time, the Standards Verifier may recommend limited certification for individual learners. The Standards Verifier can list on the e-QRF learners for whom certification may be released from a drop-down list of registered learners. These learners will have their certificates once the e-QRF is submitted.

As Internal Verifier, you are responsible for confirming and authenticating all claims for certification. If sampling reveals problems with assessment you will be asked to resolve the issues.

Standards Verifier support

Standards Verifiers advise and support centres in the delivery and assessment of Edexcel NVQ/SVQs both during and between visits.

Standards Verifiers are prepared to advise on:

- current requirements and procedures relating to the relevant qualification areas
- best practice in assessment and internal verification
- meeting the needs of learners with special assessment requirements
- administration, for example completion of forms for the NVQ/SVQ
- Additional services, publications and products from Edexcel Pearson

Enquiries or appeals

If you are unclear about what our requirements are, or you feel you have not had information from us that you need, you can formally complain or enquire to us. If you believe that the Standards Verifier has acted incorrectly or has reached an incorrect decision, then you can appeal. Our Enquiries and Appeals Policy is available from www.edexcel.com.

Electronic management of NVQ/SVQ learners

Full instructions for the administration of NVQ/SVQ learners can be found in the Edexcel Information Manual, which is available from www.edexcel.com. It is strongly recommended that senior decision makers in centres consider the use of electronic management systems for examination officers and NVQ/SVQ administrators.

Edexcel Online has been set up as a free resource for centres to manage the administration function. Information about Edexcel Online is available on the Edexcel website. Registration for this facility should be made by contacting the **Customer Service Team** on **0844 576 0024** or via www.edexcelonline.com.

It is important that copies of the relevant sections of the Edexcel Information Manual are made available to examination officers and NVQ/SVQ administrators and to all co-ordinators and members of staff responsible for the preparation of documents for enrolment, registration, assessment and reporting of achievement for learners on all NVQ/SVQ programmes or individual NVQ/SVQ units.

Centres must adhere to the timetables for prompt registration and certification in the Edexcel Information Manual. This includes supplying Edexcel with timely and accurate data, when certificates are required. Additional fees may be charged for late registrations and additional work incurred by Edexcel. If the deadlines are not met, Edexcel cannot guarantee prompt certification.

Learners for NVQ/SVQ programmes should be registered promptly with Edexcel using EDI or Edexcel Online. This ensures that Edexcel is aware that a programme is running and that a Standards Verifier visit is required. Learner registration triggers Standards Verifier allocations and visits to allow certification. Changes to centre records should be maintained using EDI or Edexcel Online.

Please note that SA1 (BTEC) forms must not be used for NVQ/SVQ learner registrations except in exceptional circumstances. If you wish to make registrations on an SA1 (BTEC) form for any reason please contact the **Service Operations** department on serviceoperations@edexcel.com.

All learner stationery for registration and certification purposes will be sent to the approved centre for the attention of the examinations officer at the main centre address. However, if necessary, this may be sent to a sub-centre or separate site address. Any problems with delivery to the address used must be notified to the Service Operations department.