Standardisation
Policy and Procedures

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Standardisation Policy and Procedures

1. Purpose

This document sets out Open Awards' approach to standardisation and the expectation of its centres to maintain the validity, quality and consistency of our qualifications.

Robust standardisation practices should be applied both within and between centres provides the evidence of consistent practice and ensures that standards are comparable both across centres and over time. Open Awards' standardisation policy and procedures are designed to ensure that standards are comparable:

- within centres (including satellite sites and third parties)
- between different types of providers (e.g. schools, FE colleges, employers)
- across different subject areas
- by modes of delivery (e.g. classroom, blended, distance learning)
- over time.

It replaces all previous standardisation policies and procedures from the operative date.

2. Scope

This document is applicable for the following Open Awards products:

Ofqual regulated qualifications and units	☑
Access to HE Diplomas	☑
Quality Endorsed Courses	☒
Badge of Excellence	☒

3. Regulatory Authorities

The relevant regulatory authorities are Ofqual and Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA). Every attempt has been made to ensure that the provisions of this document are consistent with the requirements of the regulatory authorities.

Where the requirements of a regulatory authority change, or where inadvertently these procedures conflict with those of the regulatory authority, the latter shall apply. Where the requirements of the regulatory authority are amended and require changes to this document, such changes will be made as soon as practicable and Open Awards will inform centres accordingly.

4. Audience

This document is for use by the following:
- Approved centre staff
  - quality assurance contact
  - tutor/assessors
  - internal quality assurers
  - Authorised Internal Verifiers (AIVs)
  - Access to HE coordinators

- Open Awards
  - Staff
  - Access to HE Pathway Moderators
  - External Quality Assurers

5.   Definitions

Standardisation is a process to ensure that the assessment criteria for a qualification or unit are applied consistently by assessors, moderators and verifiers. It is undertaken through a range of activities whereby the assessed work of learners within a unit or qualification is systematically compared to confirm standards.

Effective standardisation processes ensure that standards are comparable within centres (across all sites), across different types of centres, across different sector subject areas and over time.

The achievement of quality and consistency is underpinned by a number of inter-related features of standardisation activity:

Pre-Verification	Internal quality assurance processes to pre-verify proposed assessment tasks before they are delivered.
Internal standardisation	Events held for staff at the same centre where more than one member of staff assesses learners on the same course or similar courses. Internal standardisation ensures that assessment decisions and recommendations for the award of credit to learners are based on common understanding and practices.
External Standardisation	Standardisation events run by Open Awards to which multiple approved centres participate. These events provide opportunity to ensure the consistency of the award of certificates to learners between centres.
External Quality Assurance	The process by which Open Awards monitors the ongoing quality and compliance monitoring of each centre. This process ensures that all Open Awards units and qualifications are subject to robust centre standardisation, and approved centres contribute to the external

	standardisation of its qualifications.
Open Awards internal standardisation	Standardisation of our own practice and procedures to ensure that all those providing external quality assurance for Open Awards are working to the same standard.

6. Policy

Open Awards is committed to ensuring that assessment and internal quality assurance decisions are accurate and consistent. Our Standardisation process has been designed to ensure that learners, centres, HEIs, employers and regulators can be confident about the validity of certificates achieved through Open Awards.

Confirmation of the consistent application of assessment to ensure learner achievement is a key priority for all awarding organisations and approved centres. Development of a robust standardisation process, which can be applied both within centres and nationally, provides the evidence of consistent practice. The process ensures that standards are comparable both across centres and over time.

Open Awards ensures standards are consistent across all centres by:

- ensuring that all approved centres' internal quality assurance procedures incorporate processes for proposed tasks to be pre-verified prior to delivery. Where a course has been previously delivered, centres must review issues raised by learners, assessors, internal quality assurers and Open Awards; making changes accordingly.
- ensuring that standardisation occurs within centres as part of a rigorous internal quality assurance process through the centre recognition process, and ongoing monitoring conducted by Open Awards.
- ensuring that centres monitor and maintain the quality and integrity of assessment practices and decisions within their centre and across sites where applicable.
- planning and delivering a comprehensive annual programme of standardisation events that enable internal quality assurers, AIVs and Open Awards quality staff to compare outcomes of assessment.
- ensuring that all Open Awards quality staff adopt a consistent approach in quality assuring the delivery of qualifications and units at approved centres.
- monitoring assessment and achievement over time.

Standardisation activities allow Open Awards to:

- Provide an opportunity to ensure the consistency of the award of credit to learners encompassing different verifiers / assessors / different types of centres and agree the standards to be achieved.

- Compare the different assessment strategies used across a unit(s) and to ensure that the assessment strategy is fit for purpose and allows for the production of evidence which is:

- o Sufficient — There is enough evidence to demonstrate achievement against assessment criteria.

- o Appropriate — For the level and type and complexity of the learning.

- o Authentic — The evidence is attributable to the learner. (Where a scribe has been used the learner and scribe have both signed the work).

- o Valid — Relevant to the specifications of the qualification or unit for which achievement is being claimed. Where achievement is graded, assessed work must reflect the defined standards for the grade awarded.

- o Reliable — Consistent standards are operated in awarding learner achievement by within and between centre, across different sector subject areas and over time.

- Ensure that the assessment strategy and the assignment task(s) does not prevent any unintended barriers to achievement for a particular learner and pays due respect to any issues of equality and diversity.

- Ensure that the assessment tasks are written in language that is appropriate to the level and is free from bias.

- Ensure that assessment decisions made by the assessor and confirmed by the quality assurers are consistently "safe" (e.g. made against specified criteria, valid, sufficient, reliable and fair).

- Ensure consistency in the assessment judgements that are being made based on the available evidence.

- Ensure the standard of the feedback provided to learners is detailed, specific, identifies strengths and highlights areas for improvement.

- Ensure the adequacy of the feedback provided to assessors and the robustness of the internal verification of the assessment judgements is detailed, specific and incorporates SMART targets to address any aspects of assessor practice that needs improvement.

- Review the appropriateness and currency of the units and their fitness for purpose in the current context and make any necessary recommendations/ reviews

- Identify and share best practice.

If significant shortcomings are identified, this will be an area of enquiry for future Open Awards quality reviews for the relevant centre(s)/ qualification(s).

Any shortcomings in assessment practices identified through standardisation

activities will not normally affect the achievement of learners previously certificated. Where achievement relates to qualifications that provide a license to practice, certificates may be revoked.

Access to HE

It is a condition of centre approval that all Open Awards Access to HE Provider organisations participate in standardisation activities annually.

As a minimum requirement, each Access to HE provider must:

- Plan and undertake standardisation of internally set tasks and the outcomes of internal Assessment.
- Contribute assessed material to Open Awards standardisation activities and events upon the request of Open Awards Access to HE staff.
- Allow subject specialist staff to participate in and attend standardisation activities organised by Open Awards.

7. Responsibility of centres

Ongoing standardisation through external quality assurance

The Open Awards quality assurance team monitors the assessment and internal quality assurance of qualifications and units through external quality assurance activities at each approved centre. These visits are designed to confirm the consistency and authenticity of assessment decisions and confirm the validity of claims for certification and authenticity of learners' evidence.

In line with the centre agreement, centres must comply with our external quality assurance requirements and assist us in carrying out reasonable monitoring and quality assurance activities.

Open Awards will liaise with the centre's nominated quality contact in advance to ensure that all evidence needed to complete the external quality assurance activity is made available in a timely manner and in a format that is accessible and indexed.

We adopt a risk-based approach to sampling to take into account the specific circumstances of the centre, which may increase or decrease the sample size. We reserve the right to increase the sample size on the day of the visit.

Open Awards also operates a policy of making unannounced visits to centres when assessment sessions are scheduled.

Pre-Verification

All approved centres' internal quality assurance procedures must incorporate processes for proposed assessment tasks to be pre-verified prior to delivery.

Pre-verification provides a centre with the opportunity to ensure that the method of assessment is:
- fit for purpose
- an appropriate assessment method that meets the needs of the learners
- consistent with the specification for that qualification
- based on the current specification
- achievable based on the available resources.

Pre-verification should take place on a systematic basis as part of the centre's internal review process. In addition, pre-verification will be required when:
- a unit/qualification is being delivered by a newly approved centre for the first time
- a unit/qualification is being delivered by an existing centre for the first time
- an existing centre wishes to improve the assessment for a unit/qualification that it has previously delivered
- recent quality assurance reports for an existing centre have identified concerns over assessment for any unit/qualification
- a centre has been placed under a sanction or have a related condition attached to their centre approval.

Internal standardisation

Where more than one member of staff assesses learners on the same course or similar courses, the centre must arrange internal, centre standardisation events to review the assessment practices and decisions of each member of staff. This ensures that assessment decisions and recommendations for the award of credit to learners are based on common understanding and practices.

The internal quality assurer (or AIV, where appropriate) is responsible for arranging and facilitating centre standardisation events.

Internal standardisation should include all appropriate team members particularly for centres with a number of dispersed, part-time, contracted or inexperienced assessors. The internal verifier for the course(s) has the responsibility for arranging and facilitating standardisation events.

The frequency of internal standardisation exercises depends on centres' internal quality assurance processes. This will depend on factors such as the:
- size of the centre
- number of tutors/assessors and internal verifiers at the centre
- quantity of units and/or qualifications delivered at the centre
- range of units and/or qualifications delivered at the centre
- number of new or inexperienced staff delivering the unit/qualification.

Documented evidence of internal standardisation exercises must be available for review by Open Awards quality staff. This should include detail of the qualifications/ units reviewed and the outcomes of the events, including action plans where appropriate.

Template documents for centre standardisation events are available to approved centres through the Open Awards Portal.

As part of compliance monitoring activities, Open Awards may review internal standardisation activities via scheduled spot checks.

External Standardisation

All approved centres are invited to participate in external standardisation events which are scheduled to take place throughout the year at locations across the UK. These events are professional development opportunities which are free of charge. All staff with assessment and internal quality assurance responsibilities should be encouraged to attend.

Centres are asked to participate in standardisation events in one of two ways:
- to contribute sample materials to the event, and
- to contribute samples.

All samples provided for use in standardisation events must be anonymised/ redacted. Centres are required to release copies of learner work upon the request of Open Awards quality staff. Where samples are required for standardisation events we endeavour to give centres as much notice as possible, with a minimum of four weeks' notice given in most cases.

Where a member of the Open Awards quality assurance team has expressed concern over assessment practices and/or decisions, the centre may be actioned to attend external standardisation. Failure to attend in a timely manner will result in sanctions being placed on the centre as per the Open Awards sanctions policy.

All centres benefitting from Direct Claims Status must participate in at least one external standardisation event per year. As outlined in the Authorised Internal Verifier (AIV) Policy:

*"AIV status is a mark of confidence by Open Awards in the individual at one of our Approved Centres. It is based on trust and subject to continuous effective performance of verification which is monitored on an ongoing basis by the Open Awards LQR allocated to the Centre. In order to maintain AIV status… **at least one AIV at the centre must have attended at least one standardisation event within the academic year.**"*

Failure to comply will result in AIV status being withdrawn from all AIVs at the centre.

Access to HE

It is a condition of centre approval that all Open Awards Access to HE Provider organisations participate in standardisation activities annually.

Samples of learners' evidence of achievement used for Open Awards standardisation will be made available for QAA national standardisation events as

appropriate.

Open Awards supports working with other awarding organisations to raise quality standards and assure that specified levels of attainment for a qualification are consistent and reliable.

8. Monitoring and Review

Open Awards will review this policy bi-annually as part of its self-evaluation arrangements and revise it as and when necessary in response to customer and learner feedback, changes in its practices, advice from the regulatory authorities or external agencies or changes in legislation.

In addition, this policy may be updated in light of operational feedback to ensure our standardisation arrangements remain effective.

9. Related documents

This policy should also be read in conjunction with the following Open Awards documents:

- Centre Agreement
- Centre Handbook
- Access to HE Provider Handbook
- Authorised Internal Verifiers Policy
- Sanctions Policy

10. Regulatory Requirements

The Standardisation policy is designed to fulfil the requirements of our Regulators, specifically:

Ofqual General Conditions of Recognition

C2	Arrangements with centres
D1	Fitness for purpose of qualifications, which requires qualifications to meet the requirements of validity, reliability, comparability, manageability and minimising bias.
G1	Setting the assessment
G9	Delivering the assessment
H1	Marking the assessment
H2	Moderation where an assessment is marked by a Centre
H3	Monitoring the specified levels of attainment for a qualification
H5	Results for a qualification must be based on sufficient evidence

QAA The Access to Higher Education Diploma specification 2013

92, 93, 94, 95, 96, 97, 98, 99, 100, 101, 102

Part B: Standardisation Procedures

The achievement of quality and consistency of Open Awards qualifications and units is underpinned by a number of inter-related features of standardisation activity. The procedures for each of these features is outlined below.

1   External Quality Assurance

Open Awards monitor the assessment and internal verification of qualifications and units at approved centres through external quality assurance activities including the external verification or moderation of learner work.

External quality assurance is designed to confirm the consistency and authenticity of assessment decisions and confirm the validity of claims for certification and authenticity of learners' evidence.

Due to the diversity of **Open Awards** approved centres we use a risk-based approach to sampling to take into account the specific circumstances of the centre being visited, which may increase or decrease the sample size. Sample size may be affected by a range of factors including:

- the centre's risk rating
- outstanding actions and sanctions placed on the centre
- experience of assessors and internal quality assurers
- the centre's track record of working with Open Awards
- number of learners registered and/or certificates claimed
- the number of sites and their location

The scope of the sample (learners, units, assessors, internal quality assurers) will be selected and communicated in advance of the visit. We reserve the right to increase the sample size on the day of the visit.

If the sample shows that the centre is not applying the required standards:
- the area of concern will be recorded on the quality activity report, identifying whether any assessment decisions have been overturned
- the centre's quality assurance contact will be advised immediately
- additional samples will be requested to ascertain the extent of the non-compliance
- appropriate actions will be placed on the centre
- appropriate sanctions may be placed on the centre
- Open Awards' Head of Quality and Standards will be notified to act in accordance with our arrangements for dealing with potential adverse effects.

2 Pre-verification
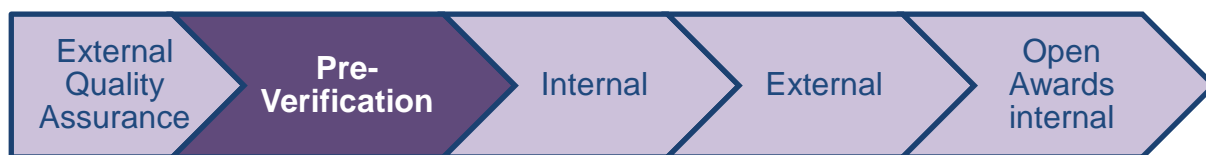
All approved centres' internal quality assurance procedures must incorporate processes for proposed assessment tasks to be pre-verified prior to delivery.

Pre-verification provides a centre with the opportunity to ensure that the method of assessment is:

- fit for purpose
- an appropriate assessment method that meets the needs of the learners
- consistent with the specification for that qualification.
- based on the current specification
- achievable based on the available resources

Pre-verification should take place on a systematic basis as part of the centre internal review process. In addition, pre-verification will be required when:

- a unit/qualification is being delivered by a newly recognised centre for the first time
- a unit/qualification is being delivered by an existing centre for the first time
- an existing centre wishes to improve the assessment for a unit/qualification that it has previously delivered
- recent quality assurance reports for an existing centre have identified concerns over assessment for any unit/qualification
- a centre has been placed under a sanction or have a related condition attached to their centre recognition

When the unit is new to the centre, the assessor(s) and internal verifier(s) will need to undertake pre-verification before they are issued to learners to determine the most appropriate assessment methods.

When the centre has already delivered the unit, Open Awards will normally expect pre-verification to be undertaken internally by centre staff as part of internal standardisation activities.

In certain circumstances, we may request that pre-verification is undertaken by Open Awards quality staff.

The centre must retain all pre-verification paperwork, including IQA feedback and outcomes for at least three years and made available to Open Awards on request.

3 Internal standardisation

| External Quality Assurance | Pre-Verification | **Internal Standardisation** | External | Open Awards internal |

In any centre where there is more than one tutor / assessor delivering the same course or similar courses and making assessment decisions and recommendations for the award of credit to learners the internal quality assurance process must include an opportunity for the standardisation of their practice.

Frequency
The frequency of internal standardisation events depends on centres' internal quality assurance processes. This will depend on factors such as the:
- size of the centre;
- number of tutors/assessors and internal verifiers at the centre;
- quantity of units and/or qualifications delivered at the centre;
- range of units and/or qualifications delivered at the centre;
- modes of delivery
- number of new or inexperienced staff delivering the unit/qual.

Attendees
All tutors, assessors and internal quality assurers currently delivering or involved in the planning and delivery of the qualification should be invited to attend internal standardisation. Where possible, it should include all appropriate team members particularly for centres with a number of dispersed, part-time, contracted or inexperienced assessors.

The internal quality assurer for the course(s) has the responsibility for arranging and facilitating standardisation events. The IQA will normally plan and facilitate the event and they should be prepared to compile a report of the discussions, agreements and actions.

Invites should be sent in advance, giving consideration to the need for any preparatory work participants may need to do prior to the event.

Selecting and collecting samples

The provider's standardisation strategy should include a plan which sets out which units are to be standardised. This should ensure that, over time, all units and courses are reviewed through this process. It will be determined by the nature of the courses and the overall number of units offered. Open Awards may request that you include specific units within your internal standardisation.

Clear instructions must be agreed and given to assessors and internal quality assurers about what should be included in the sample. There should be a clear rationale for the sample choice which may include any of the following factors:
- strong evidence of achievement
- weak evidence of achievement and the reason for that judgement

- evidence which is not sufficient to demonstrate achievement of all the assessment criteria
- the use of an innovative assessment strategy or a new or innovative assessment method
- an example of good and constructive feedback to a student
- an example of good and constructive feedback from the internal quality assurer to the assessor
- evidence from a student who has not achieved and why
- any other valid reasons for the selection

The sample should include evidence assessed by each of the assessors involved and evidence internally verified by each of the IQAs.

Centres may wish to consider redacting samples in advance of internal standardisation events and removing any evidence of assessment so that completely clean samples can be considered. This blind marking approach allows participants to formulate their own judgement, without being aware of the actual assessment decision.

Running the event

The following documents should be made available for the event:

- Standardisation Event Activity Sheet– sufficient copies for each unit
- Standardisation Event Feedback Form– one per participant
- Assessment Definitions and Level Descriptor documents
- Qualification guides
- Unit profiles
- Course/ tutor handbook (where appropriate)
- QAA Grading Scheme Handbook September 2013 (where appropriate)
- Samples outlined above.

Each participant should examine each sample and record their responses to the questions on the **Standardisation Event Activity Sheet** available to approved centres via the secure portal. This means that all participants should see the same samples. This can be varied depending on the size of the group and in some cases be done in pairs or in groups. Enough time should be set aside for this activity which will depend on the number and nature of the units under review.

A typical internal standardisation event covers the following activities for each unit:
- reviewing the learning outcomes and assessment criteria of the units
- reviewing any additional unit information (e.g. for Access to HE this would include grade descriptors)
- reviewing assignment briefs, tasks activities adopted for the unit to check whether they fully meet the requirements of the unit
- consider whether assessment methods are relevant and appropriate and pitched at the right level for the learner

- review evidence to check whether the evidence of achievement is sufficient, appropriate, authentic, valid and reliable
- for graded units, review the differentiated judgements that are indicated by the award of different grades. For Access to HE, activities should provide a focus on judgements made about the use of grade indicators of pass, merit and distinction, as they are applied for each of the grade descriptors, in different subject areas.
- consider whether approaches to assessment decisions are consistent
- review the standards of assessor feedback to the learner, and from the IQA to the assessor
- identify and share good practice
- agree and record any changes to assessment decisions
- agree actions needed to ensure that everyone assesses at a consistent standard in future

All participants should record their findings for the units scrutinised. The facilitator should lead a discussion of the participants' findings. This will probably best be achieved by considering each sample in turn and sharing participants' views. It is important to remember that the main outcome of this discussion should focus on agreeing and defining acceptable standards.

The facilitator should record the outcomes of this discussion and produce a summary report (**Provider Standardisation Feedback Form**) of the findings identifying actions agreed. It should be made clear when this report will be available if it is not within the event itself.

Action plan and development

The outcomes of the standardisation event should include any areas for development which were identified or raised within the meeting in addition to the identification of good practice.

Any actions should have a timescale for completion and should identify the person responsible for its completion. The facilitator will be expected to disseminate documents and feedback to relevant internal staff unable to attend the event. All information and evidence of the process should be made available to the Open Awards quality assurance team.

Document retention

Documented evidence of internal standardisation exercises must be available for review by Open Awards quality staff. This should include detail of the qualifications/ units reviewed and the outcomes of the events, including action plans where appropriate.

4 External Standardisation

| External Quality Assurance | Pre-Verification | Internal | **External Standardisation** | Open Awards internal |

Approved centres must allow tutors, assessors and internal quality assurance staff to participate in and attend standardisation activities organised by Open Awards upon request. Centres are also asked to participate in standardisation events by providing sample materials to the event.

Booking attendance

Centres will be informed of the dates for external standardisation events at the beginning of each academic year. Places at standardisation events can be booked through the Open Awards website at: http://openawards.org.uk/training-and-events/

Selecting samples

For general external standardisation events we will accept samples on the day of the event but participants are expected to advise Open Awards in advance the level of the unit and provide the paperwork outlined in the Providing samples section below. For qualification-specific events (e.g. Access to HE standardisation), we select units for standardisation in advance based on defined criteria. Such criteria might take account of:
- Units with high achievement rates
- Units with low achievement rates
- The need to ensure the comparability of standards of common units across a number of qualifications
- The most popular units
- Specific sector skills areas
- Units at different levels
- Units where issues have been reported in delivery and assessment
- Units where issues have been reported over unit content
- The need to ensure standardisation of quality across different centre types

Centres will be asked to provide redacted samples at least four weeks in advance of the event.

Providing samples

The sample should support the evidence of achievement for a whole unit of assessment and should include:

1	List of learners including tracking sheets showing achievement for all learners in the group
2	Unit specification including unit code and any additional unit information
3	Unit assessment strategy mapped to all relevant assessment criteria and including grading assessment plan where appropriate.

4	Assignment brief(s)/ task sheet(s)
5	Learners' assessed work *For Access to HE, the sample should include learner achievement at Pass, Merit and Distinction grades where possible.*
6	Record of the assessment decision including feedback to the learner in relation to achievement/non-achievement of the assessment criteria/grading criteria (if applicable).
7	Internal quality assurance records including feedback to the Assessor and the IQA's judgements on the security of the award of credit.
8	Evidence where possible of subsequent monitoring of any actions identified by the internal quality assurance process.
9	Completed RA1 form for all learners for which a Reasonable Adjustment has been made at the discretion of the centre
10	The centre's internal quality assurance policy and procedures

Samples may be provided for any learners that have completed the unit(s) within the last two academic years. Centres do not need to provide samples from current learners.

Sample retention

Samples provided for external standardisation will be securely stored electronically at Open Awards and retained by Open Awards for the lifetime of the qualification or unit. This is to allow Open Awards to build up a sample in order to compare standards over time.

Dissemination of Outcomes of Standardisation Activities

Summary reports from external standardisation events are produced on a regular basis outlining findings and outcomes. Open Awards quality team uses the outcomes of standardisation events to help guide the support and guidance offered to centres including:
- Providing written guidance to address common issues in assessment and internal quality assurance
- Production of best practice examples
- Informing discussions at quality assurance activities
- Providing support to improve the quality of feedback to assessors and learners
- Ensuring the design of Open Awards units, qualifications, and associated assessment strategies are clear, deliverable and accessible
- Ensuring consistency of assessment decisions to safeguard the integrity of the award of credit and qualifications
- Improving consistency in the judgements of internal quality assurers
- Improving consistency and quality of guidance and support offered by Open Awards
- Development of Open Awards annual training programme to ensure that specific areas of need are addressed

The Head of Quality and Standards will monitor the effectiveness and outcomes of standardisation activities as part of Open Awards' self-review process.

5 Open Awards internal standardisation
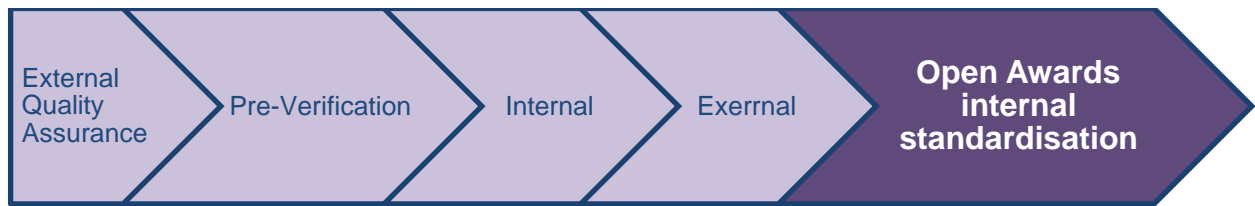
As part of the approach to standardisation, Open Awards recognises the need to ensure that our own staff adopt a consistent approach in quality assuring the delivery, assessment and internal quality assurance of qualifications and units by approved centres.

Our own internal standardisation includes:
- Adoption of standard forms, processes and procedures
- Internal audit and peer review
- Observed visits
- Peer review of quality activity reports
- Regular staff training
- Internal standardisation events to review external quality assurance decisions