

Skillsfirst Awards

Learner Guide to Qualifications

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Skillsfirst
growth through learning

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Introduction

Skillsfirst Awards is an awarding organisation specialising in the provision of vocational qualifications across a range of occupational areas.

As a learner starting a qualification through a Skillsfirst Awards centre the following will give you an insight into what you can expect. Your Skillsfirst Awards centre has gained recognition from Skillsfirst by meeting a very strict set of criteria and is required to continue to meet these criteria over time. Skillsfirst, along with your centre, will ensure you have a pleasing and organised journey through your qualification.

1. Customer service

It is the aim of Skillsfirst Awards to ensure our learners receive a quality service which meets their needs and as such we have a customer statement which details our commitment to our learners. This statement and our performance indicators can be accessed by you on our website www.skillsfirst.co.uk.

We will encourage our centres to obtain your feedback on the service and the assessment practice they offer and we may ask you for feedback on the centre practice as part of our quality management process. This may be completed during an external verification visit at your centre, or alternatively learners can complete a learner feedback questionnaire which is located on our website under the 'I am a learner' page. It is important that Skillsfirst, and your centre, ensure all regulatory requirements are met and to establish customer satisfaction levels.

3 Equality and accessibility

Skillsfirst Awards expects our centres to treat all learners and potential customers equally at all times as required by equalities law and to allow access to qualifications to all able to achieve. Your centre will have equality and reasonable adjustments and special considerations policies, copies of which will be given and explained to you at your induction to the centre and the qualification.

4 Data protection

Your centre will ask you for certain personal information eg as a minimum your name, date of birth, contact address, telephone number, workplace address and contact details and your government-issued unique learner number (ULN). You may be asked for other personal details and certain information on your progress through the qualification will be retained. Your centre is required (as part of their centre recognition approval) to have a policy on data protection to ensure the confidentiality of your personal details.

Your centre operates as an 'agent' for Skillsfirst Awards when collecting data. Therefore, when collecting any data, they are required to:

- Provide a statement to you to ensure you are aware they will share their data with Skillsfirst.
- Clearly identify themselves and/or the organisation(s) on behalf of which the data is being collected, prior to the collection of any personal data
- Refrain from holding any personal data for any purpose other than that which has been stated, which must be relevant and not excessive

- Ensure personal data is only used for the expressed purpose for which permission has been provided in advance by the supplier of the data.
- The Data Protection Act also requires your centre to ensure that the personal data and sensitive personal data held are accurate and up-to-date. Your centre should therefore update your records on a regular basis.

5 Certification

When you have successfully completed your qualification, your centre will apply for your certificate. It may be that for a variety of reasons, you have been unable to complete your full qualification, but have completed several components. In such a situation, your centre will apply for a certificate of unit credit. The certificate and the certificate of unit credit belong to you. Your centre should forward them to you as soon as they are received from Skillsfirst.

6 General enquiries

It will always be the aim of Skillsfirst Awards to ensure our learners receive a first class service and that our commitments to our customers are met. If you have any questions about Skillsfirst, your qualification or certificate, you should first of all ask your assessor or other staff in your centre. However, if you feel your questions have not been answered you can contact Skillsfirst direct as follows.

Any enquiries to Skillsfirst Awards will be dealt with in a timely manner in line with our performance indicators. All enquiries should initially be made to:

Customer Services
Skillsfirst Awards Ltd
Suite 416
Fort Dunlop
Fort Parkway
Birmingham
B24 9FD

Tel - 0121 270 5100

Email- customerservices@skillsfirst.co.uk

Our customer services department will endeavour to deal with your enquiry immediately or will assist in referring your enquiry to the relevant person.

7 Enquiries regarding decisions, complaints and appeals

There may be times when you are not happy with the service you have obtained from your centre. Your centre will have a complaints procedure which you should access and follow. If you are still not happy with the response you can contact Skillsfirst Awards at the above address. It is important that you discuss your complaint with the centre staff first, following the centre policy.

8 Appeals

Your centre will aim to ensure that at all times its decisions are fair, consistent and based on valid judgements. However, it is recognised that there may be occasions when you may wish to question a decision made. Your centre will have an appeals policy and process which clearly indicates your rights to appeal against assessment decisions taken by your centre. Your assessor will discuss the appeal policy with you at your induction. You will find a copy of the Skillsfirst Awards appeals policy on the Skillsfirst website.

9 Use of English and Welsh languages

All qualifications and assessment materials will be expressed in English. However, should there be demand from learners for specification and assessment materials in Welsh, Skillsfirst Awards will consider the viability of providing such materials. It is our intention to meet customer needs within financial constraints. If it is determined to use Welsh then an external consultant/translator will be contracted to provide translation and monitoring services.

If you would like to be assessed in a language other than English or Welsh, please request that your centre contact Skillsfirst for approval before any assessments take place. Please note that this can only be allowed where the qualification supports a job where it is not necessary to speak English or Welsh.

10 Your qualification

This is a regulated vocational qualification which has been written by industry, for industry. You are required to work in a job that relates to the qualification and which allows you to gather evidence to show you are competent and have the skills and knowledge to meet the standards.

If you are following a RQF qualification, it will recognise achievement through the awarding of units and qualification and will allow you to study at a pace, place and time that suits your individual circumstances and that of your employer.

All units use the same unit template, consisting of learning outcomes (what you need to know, understand or do) and assessment criteria (which specify if you have met the outcomes to a defined level).

RQF qualifications are made up of units which have a credit and a level value depending upon the number of hours it takes an average learner to complete, all the learning outcomes of that unit and the level of knowledge, understanding and responsibility required by that learner to complete that unit.

RQF qualifications containing one or more units with a total credit value of 12 or less are called "Awards". Qualification containing units with a total credit value of 13 to 36 are called "Certificates" and qualifications containing units with a total credit value of 37 or more, are called "Diplomas". RQF qualifications can be a mix of different units at different levels; however, at least 50% of the units must be at the level of the qualification.

11 Important people

We have mentioned the assessor before and it is important that you know who the people are who are involved in the qualification process.

11.1 Assessor

Your assessor will be qualified and be experienced in your area of work. The assessor will:

- conduct an initial assessment
- initially explain the qualification to you and what is required
- discuss any training you need
- agree an assessment plan with you on the evidence you can gather and how you will be assessed against the unit or qualification's assessment criteria
- discuss with your line manager, or others, any requirement for you to gain more experience for the qualification and what that experience is
- carry out your assessment, feed back to you on whether or not you are competent and what the next stage will be

11.2 Mentor

A mentor is someone who offers you support and advice. It is likely this will be someone in your workplace and the mentor is also someone who may be asked to give a witness testimony on how you have performed.

11.3 Witness

A witness is someone who has seen you carry out a task/job and who is therefore able to give you a witness testimony on what they have seen – either on a particular occasion or over time. Your assessor will advise you on when a witness testimony is applicable and who should offer the testimony. Witnesses can be for example your colleagues, a customer, and a line manager. An expert witness is the most useful, as they are competent at doing the job themselves and are in a position to understand what the assessment criteria of the units or qualification require. An expert witness is likely to be your line manager. A customer for example is a useful witness, but is likely to be classed a non expert witness.

11.4 Internal verifier

An internal verifier is responsible for the quality of the work in the centre. The internal verifier will monitor and check the work of the assessors and that all judgements have met the standards. Again the internal verifier will be qualified as an internal verifier and have occupational knowledge of your sector.

11.5 External verifier

The external verifier is a representative of Skillsfirst Awards and will visit the centre as part of a quality process to make sure it is carrying out all the requirements for delivering qualifications. The external verifier may look at your portfolio of work or talk to you about your experience while working on the qualification.

12 The qualification process

12.1 Initial assessment

Your assessor will carry out an initial assessment with you by:

- confirming you are going to work on an appropriate qualification and at the right level
- discussing the units/qualification that is the most appropriate for you
- confirming what you already know and can do, what you need to learn or gain more experience in. This is called a skills scan
- discussing the opportunity for the recognition of prior learning (RPL) where appropriate
- discussing the likely evidence you can collect for both RPL and your portfolio

12.2 Induction

Once the qualification and level have been agreed and the assessor has carried out your skills scan, your assessor will then induct you to the qualification and to the centre policies and procedures. Your induction will cover the following:

- the content of the qualification and the assessment process
- your responsibilities
- the centre's health and safety and equal opportunities policies
- fair access to assessment including applying reasonable adjustments if you are disabled
- complaints and appeals
- who's who in the process
- how to build a portfolio of evidence

Your assessor will ask you to sign an induction checklist to confirm the induction has been covered and that you understand the contents.

12.3 The assessment process

Skillsfirst Awards has produced handbooks on each qualification which contain full details of the standards expected and the assessment requirements for your qualification. This will be issued and explained to you by your assessor. There may also be some documents you will be required to complete, including a declaration that your evidence is authentic and that assessment has taken place under the conditions or context as described within the qualification handbook.

Good luck. Skillsfirst hopes you have an enjoyable learning journey through your qualification.