

The External Assessment of The Diploma in Social Work

A MANUAL FOR EXTERNAL ASSESSORS

October 2001

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Foreword

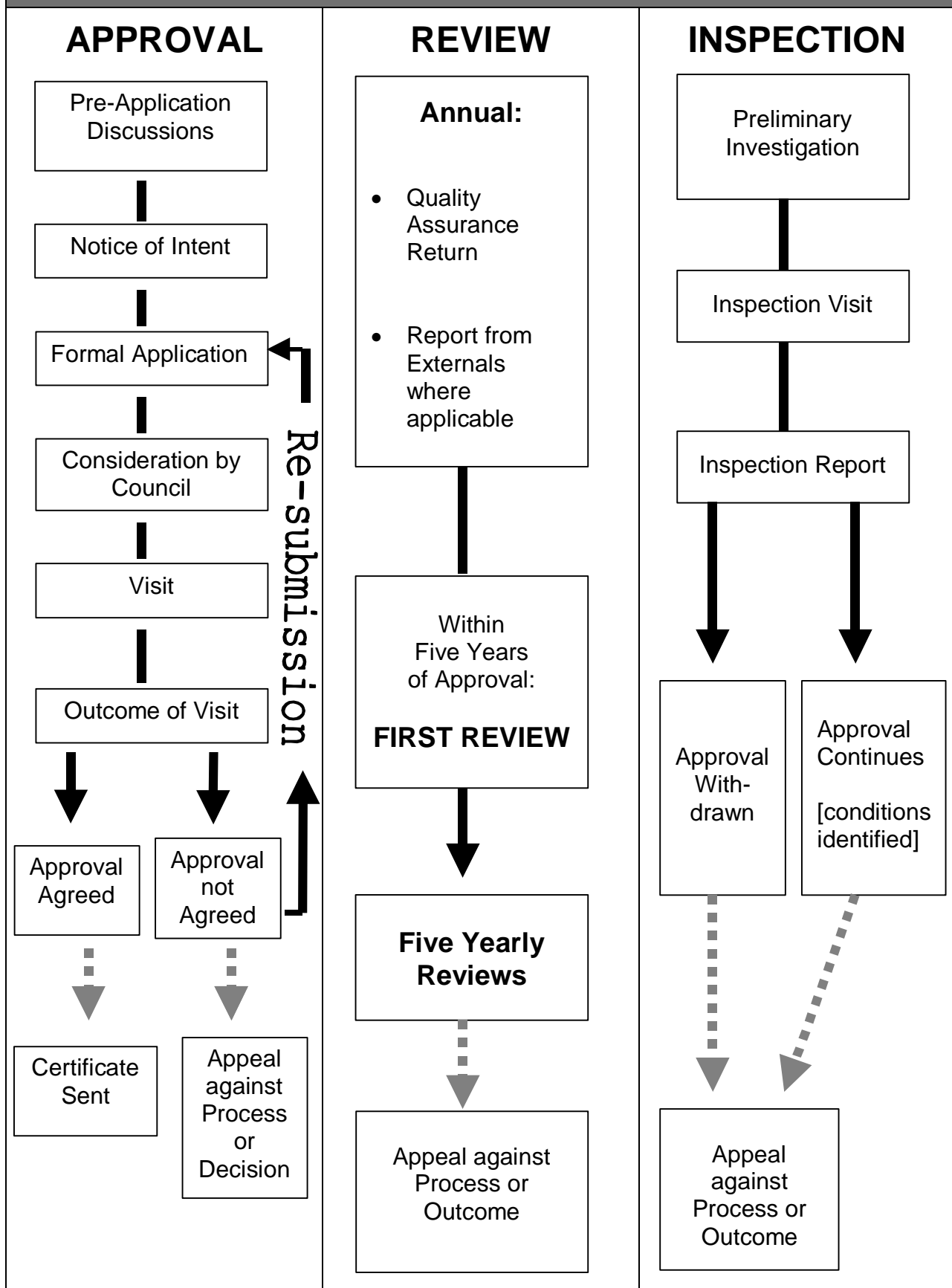
The Manual for the External Assessment of the Diploma in Social Work [DipSW] was approved by the former Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work [CCETSW]. The Care Council for Wales / Cyngor Gofal Cymru [CCW /CGC], the General Social Care Council [GSCC] and the Scottish Social Services Council [SSSC] have agreed to continue to apply the rules and requirements for the DipSW until new arrangements for social work education and training are approved in each country of the UK. The manual should be read in conjunction with Assuring Quality in the Diploma in Social Work-1: Rules and Requirements for the DipSW and Assuring Quality in Diploma in Social Work 2: Approval, Review and Inspection of DipSW Programmes.

In this document the term “Council” is used to describe the relevant Council in each country responsible for the approval and review of DipSW programmes, i.e. CCW, GSCC, NISCC or SSC. The term “Regulatory Councils” refers to all four of these bodies.

The GSCC will be responsible for the recruitment, induction and further training of external assessors to social work education and training, PQ consortia and programmes throughout the United Kingdom. The GSCC maintains approved lists of external assessors and maintains a record of the appointment of assessors to consortia and programmes.

Some services are being provided by the GSCC to the other three Regulatory Councils. Such a service is the recruitment of candidates and award of certificates. Where a service is provided by the GSCC this will be clearly indicated.

QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM



[QA System Chart]

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 This manual describes the role and functions of external assessors in the Council's quality assurance system and the procedures concerned with the external assessment of Diploma in Social Work programmes.
- 1.2 External assessment of DipSW Programmes is co-ordinated on a UK basis.
- 1.3 External assessment plays a major role in the process of assuring the quality of the Council's awards. It is linked to the Council's system for approving, reviewing and inspecting its schemes and awards shown in Figure 1. The principles and procedures of this system are common to all Council-approved schemes and awards providing an accountable and cost effective means for the Council to fulfil its statutory duties.
- 1.4 The procedures for verifying the decisions which determine whether a student has or has not qualified need to take account of the Council's statement on equal opportunities:

"The Council promotes education and training that produces competent social care and social work staff who can provide high quality services in our diverse society. The Council recognises that equal opportunity is something each individual wants for themselves and to which they have a legal right.

"Students and candidates will therefore:

- accept and respect individual rights and circumstances and understand how these affect the delivery of services for children and adults, families and communities;
- learn how to counter discrimination, racism, poverty, disadvantage and injustice in ways appropriate to the situation and their role.

"Providers of social care and social work education and training and assessment centres will:

- eliminate unfair discrimination and disadvantage in all aspects of their work regulated by the Council;
- demonstrate this consistently through the quality assurance process.

"The Council will:

- take action through the quality assurance process to ensure the implementation of Council policies."

2.0 External Assessment and Quality Assurance

Critical to the quality of service received by users is the competence of students who have benefited from training and assessment provided by Diploma in Social Work programmes. Competence is also critical to their acceptability to employers and prospects for future professional development.

2.1 External assessors appointed by the Council play an essential role in quality assuring competence by confirming that students who have gone through a DipSW programme's assessment processes have achieved the required standard. They confirm to students, employers, programmes and Council that the results of assessment are:

- valid as a measure of the extent to which assessment actually assesses what it claims to assess and not irrelevant, extraneous achievements or characteristics;
- reliable in that the same results would be obtained under different circumstances e.g. if a different assessor or different occasion had been chosen;
- comparable between programmes UK wide.

2.2 External assessment procedures are located within the wider framework of arrangements designed to maintain and improve the quality of assessment, key features of which are the work of advisers/inspectors in the offices of the General Social Care Council [GSCC], the Care Council of Wales [CCW], the Scottish Social Services Council [SSSC] or the Northern Ireland Social Care Council [NISCC], the GSCC's Registrar and the programme's own quality assurance arrangements.. These arrangements help to maintain the value of the DipSW award to students and employers and to maintain the public accountability of the qualification.

3.0 Recruitment to the General Social Care Council's Approved List

3.1 External assessors are recruited in open competition by the GSCC's External Assessors Co-ordinator under an agreement with the three other Regulatory Councils [SSSC, CCW and NISCC]. They are selected on the basis of their suitability and competence (see section 4) from the information contained in the application form in the light of the advertised specification, within the constraint of maintaining an appropriate balance of interests in the GSCC's Approved List. The selection panel includes staff from the other regulatory bodies and is chaired by the External Assessor Co-ordinator.

- 3.2 The Approved List of external assessors of the DipSW award contains details of the experienced practitioners and educators recruited and inducted by the GSCC and takes into account education, employment interests, i.e. statutory social services, the voluntary and independent sectors, and race, gender, disability, and fluency in the Welsh language.
- 3.3 Copies of the Approved List are issued by the UK External Assessors Co-ordinator to programmes.

4.0 The Competence of External Assessors

Externals are selected for their expertise in assessment and previous relevant experience. They will have demonstrated their credibility to others through their involvement in higher education or practice settings at DipSW level. Their knowledge and experience of assessment will enable them to provide critical insight into DipSW programmes' assessment practice.

5.0 Induction

Before being placed on the Approved List and selected for appointment, external assessors are required to attend a one day induction event organised by the UK External Assessors Co-ordinator and Inspectors/Advisers.

6.0 Selection and Appointment of External Assessors to Programmes

- 6.1 When programmes are approved by the Council they are required to select two external assessors from the Approved List. This should be at the beginning of the intake for which the assessor undertakes responsibility. Between them, the pair of external assessors must be able to deal with all aspects of a programme's assessment work. In general, this means that programmes are advised to seek the appointment of one external assessor with experience in teaching and one external assessor with experience in practice. Programmes may not enter into reciprocal arrangements for the exchange of external assessors.

The programme gives a copy of the approval submission and other recent documentation to the proposed external assessor and they discuss the nature, scope and particular features of the programme's provision. If the external assessor is willing to take on the appointment, the programme notifies the UK External Assessors Co-ordinator and the programme liaison adviser/inspector at the earliest opportunity.

- 6.2 It is recommended that externals appointed by programmes in Wales are competent in the Welsh language in support of the Councils Welsh language Scheme.
- 6.3 If the external assessor is unwilling to be nominated, or there is a conflict of interest, the process is repeated.
- 6.4 Programmes must notify the UK External Assessors Co-ordinator and the liaison adviser/inspector of subsequent changes in the appointment of external assessors.
- 6.5 The liaison adviser/inspector will establish contact with the external assessor to confirm the purpose and timing of the external assessor's three points of contact with the programme.
- 6.6 Normally, external assessors are not expected to work with more than two programmes. Exceptionally, they may be allowed to work with a third. Appointments will not be confirmed with more than three programmes concurrently.
- 6.7 External assessors are appointed to a programme for a period of three years and are not eligible for appointment to the same programme for a further period of three years. By agreement with a programme, and for a specific purpose such as ensuring continuity, an appointment may be extended for a further period up to a maximum of two years.
- 6.8 External assessors are appointed to the Council Approved List for a maximum period of five years. Should the period expire before the end of an appointment to a programme, external assessors may complete their period of service with that programme. Before the end of the five-year period, those appointed to the Approved List will be notified that they may apply for re-appointment to the list and that they will be considered together with other applicants.

7.0 Additional Appointments

- 7.1 There may be exceptional circumstances in which the provision of two external assessors is not sufficient. Provision of external assessment resources may be increased at the Council's discretion, and could take the form of payment for additional work by existing external assessors.
- 7.2 The UK External Assessors Co-ordinator will consider the possibility of additional external assessment resources following a written request from the inspector / adviser allocated to the programme. The decision will rest on the information provided.

Such a request would normally follow an approach to the liaison adviser/inspector from the external assessors or the programme. The adviser/inspector will seek to justify the proposed additional resource by providing details of the increased scale of operation. It should include:

- (a) the increase in number of students since gaining approval;
- (b) the size of the sample undertaken by the external assessors and the growth in the sample since appointment to the programme;
- (c) change in the complexity of assessment arrangements and how this causes increased time to be spent on external assessment;
- (d) details of the impact of these factors on external assessment;
- (e) an indication of the external assessment arrangements that would be made if additional resources were to be provided.

8.0 The Role of External Assessors

8.1 External assessors are required to:

- have direct contact with the programme at three identifiable points each year. However, an external assessor will be expected to visit the programme on at least two occasions and to plan the visits so as to attend one or more major assessment meeting of the Board;
- verify the programme assessment practice and procedures by sampling the material submitted by students for assessment, examining all work assessed as marginal/failing, altering assessment decisions if necessary, and certifying all assessment decisions including referred or deferred assessment;
- clarify with the inspector/adviser (allocated to the programme) the specific interpretation of a requirement;
- report on their findings and judgements to both the programme and the Council annually on forms provided by the Council.

8.2 Verifying that those responsible for the programme assessment processes make fair assessment decisions based on valid evidence is central to the external assessor's role. The verification activity lays emphasis on checking that the assessment system generates decisions that provide assurance of competence. This does not mean inspecting the quality of every assessment by doing the assessment again. The role is to verify assessment practice and through this to endorse and certify the assessment decision in respect of every student.

8.3 As members of the programme's assessment board the external assessors must ensure that pass recommendations are based on evidence that students have adequately:

- (i) met the practice requirements of the six core competences, including the achievement of core competence Assess and Plan through work with people with significantly different needs and circumstances, and made skilled use of a range of social work methods;
 - (ii) met the value requirements through evidence drawn from practice undertaken in relation to the six core competences;
 - (iii) acquired a general understanding of the knowledge base for the DipSW and developed and applied aspects of that knowledge in the context of their pathway through the DipSW and their related practice learning opportunities;
 - (iv) demonstrated through formal written assessment their understanding and application of law relating to social work of the country in which they are training;
 - (v) reflected upon and critically analysed their practice and transferred knowledge, skills and values in practice.
- 8.4 External assessors need to remain impartial if they are to monitor effectively the standards of assessment achieved by programmes. It would not be appropriate for them to provide a form of consultancy or undertake development work with the programmes to which they are appointed.
- 8.5 In sampling the work submitted by students, external assessors will need sufficient material to check the quality of assessments. They are advised to use judgement about the amount of material necessary to establish their confidence in the standards being maintained by the programme. The Council expects its external assessors to see any assessment evidence they require for the purpose of constructing an adequate sample, which it is suggested should form 10 per cent of the assessment material of the candidates under consideration. The sample should include the full range of abilities shown by students, and ensure coverage of all aspects of assessment for the award of the DipSW.
- 8.6 If in the course of sampling the external assessor comes across an assessment decision that is not well founded, it is essential that the external assessor refers that work back to the assessment board for further attention.

Similarly, indications that assessment arrangements are failing to observe the Council's equal opportunities policy should lead the external assessor to raise this matter with the assessment board.

The external assessor should comment on the issues of standard and quality control raised by such discoveries.

- 8.7 External assessors also examine the assessment evidence used in support of all marginal or fail decisions. If they find instances where the assessment evidence does not appear to justify the assessment decision, they should bring this to the attention of the programme and raise it with the assessment board.

- 8.8 Whether through sampling or by examining marginal/fail decisions, and irrespective of the assessment structure of the programme (e.g. modular) external assessors have the power to alter assessment decisions that are not well founded.
- 8.9 Whenever external assessors judge that improvement to assessment practice and programme procedures is needed, they will give a clear recommendation to the programme. Such a recommendation is not expected to specify a plan of action. It is for the programme to do this. It will be sufficient for the external assessor to identify clearly the issue that the programme needs to address, to inform the Council, and to comment in the next annual report on the action taken by the programme. This aspect of the role of external assessors can initiate or contribute to the process of calling a preliminary investigation, which may result in an inspection as shown in figure 1.

9.0 The Duties of External Assessors

9.1 The duties of external assessors are:

- (i) to be members of, and to attend meetings of the programme's assessment board;
- (ii) to verify that students who have passed the formal assessment for the award of the DipSW have demonstrated the knowledge, skills and values needed to achieve competence in social work;
- (iii) to determine how well a programme's assessment arrangements are operating and to confirm that assessment meets the Council's requirements;
- (iv) to satisfy themselves that programmes have effective internal procedures to ensure the quality and consistency of assessment;
- (v) to be aware of the resource implications of complex assessment provision, and to comment on the extent to which the expenditure of time and resources to secure assessment outcomes is realistic/reasonable;
- (vi) to sample assessment evidence and judgements;
- (vii) to examine evidence relating to students whose work has been assessed as marginal or failing, and where appropriate alter assessment decisions in respect of an individual student;
- (viii) to certify the assessment decision in respect of each student, both at intermediate and final stages, including decisions relating to the progress or non-continuation of students who have failed or been referred or deferred;
- (ix) to ensure the programme upholds, throughout its assessment arrangements, its commitment to the Council's equal opportunities policy;

- (x) to advise programme providers formally through the provision of annual reports to the Council about the adequacy and appropriateness of standard setting and assessment tasks, processes and procedures within the programme;
- (xi) to attend standardisation meetings organised by the UK External Assessors Co-ordinator.

9.2 As a guide, these duties will need five days annually on average for external assessment and one day for the standardisation meeting at (xi) above.

10.0 Conduct of External Assessors

In setting out its expectations of external assessors in performing their role and duties, the Council follows established custom and practice in respect of external assessment generally. In particular, it emphasises that:

- (i) external assessors have a duty to carry out their work objectively and fairly and in accordance with the Council's policies on equal opportunities;
- (ii) they must be capable of independent judgement, be seen to be independent and at all costs avoid conflicts of interest. External assessors may not be employed by or have any other contractual or financial relationship with any educational institution or agencies involved in the DipSW programme to which they are appointed. Where they have a personal interest in any student, educational institution or agency directly concerned, they should declare the interest;
- (iii) all work presented by students and any reports and other records used in the process of assessment are owned by the authorised bodies undertaking that assessment (programme assessment boards). Furthermore, all such material must be treated as strictly confidential. Externals may not disclose the content of any material used in assessment, or information about students, to those not authorised to receive it. This would, for example, preclude the use of such material for training elsewhere.

11.0 Management of External Assessors

The UK External Assessors Co-ordinator is responsible for recruitment, appointment and termination of appointment, induction and standardisation activities, and specification of the conditions of appointment as set out in this manual.

12.0 Relation with the Council's Liaison Advisors/Inspectors

12.1 It is the responsibility of the regulatory councils' staff to liaise with individual external assessors, provide clarification of the Council's requirements, respond to reports, request additional appointments, and take initial action when performance falls short of the conditions of appointment as set out in this manual.

12.2 The Programme approval, review and inspection processes are undertaken by the four Councils across the UK.

12.3 Inspectors/advisers are allocated to programmes to monitor standards through the reports they receive from the external assessors and the annual quality assurance returns provided to them by programmes.

Programmes monitor the quality of student assessments through internal quality assurance arrangements.

External assessors contribute information and judgements to the monitoring of programmes through the verification of assessment practice and programme procedures and the powers they have to take final pass/fail decisions.

12.4 It is for the programme to act on the recommendations of the external assessors.

12.5 The liaison adviser/inspector will consider the contents of the external assessors' reports and programme's annual quality assurance return, take note of any recommendations given and action taken, and comment as necessary. If urgent discussion is required, the liaison adviser/inspector will visit the programme. The external assessors will be informed in writing of the liaison adviser's response.

12.6 If the programme fails to take action as recommended, the external assessor is expected to make reference to this in subsequent reports.

12.7 The liaison adviser/inspector is responsible for deciding whether work undertaken by the DipSW programme to meet the Council's requirements is satisfactory or whether a recommendation for an inspection should be made to the Chief Executive/Head of Education of the relevant regulatory councils.

13.0 External Assessor Contact with the Programme

13.1 Contacts with the programme should be part of a planned use of time, which should be shared with the liaison adviser/inspector (see para. 6.6).

13.2 The external's key points of reference are this manual, Assuring Quality in the Diploma in Social Work-1: Rules and Requirements for the DipSW and Assuring

Quality in the Diploma in Social Work-2: Approval, Review and Inspection of DipSW Programmes specifically section 6 "Assessment Systems and Structures" of Figure 2 in the latter document.

- 13.3 In a year, an external will be expected to have considered each aspect of assessment as identified in these requirements in order to verify that the outcome is satisfactory.
- 13.4 External assessors must have a copy of the programme approval submission, reviews, and recent relevant documentation, before the first contact. This is given to external assessors by the programme as part of the selection process described in paragraph 6.1 of this manual.

14.0 Annual Report and Records of Contact

- 14.1 External assessors are encouraged to record their findings following each of the three points of contact with the programme (see para. 8.1). Each assessor will report annually on a form provided by the Council covering the areas indicated. Though the reports are separate, assessors will need to consult each other and make clear in their individual report any divergence of view.
- 14.2 The annual reports must be sent to the programme and the liaison adviser/inspector:
- by September 30 for programmes with an academic year format;
 - by February 28 or 29 for programmes with a calendar year format.
- These reporting dates ensure that the external assessor report is received one month before the programme reports to the Council.
- 14.3 If during the year before the reports are due the external assessors need to raise concerns urgently with the programme and Council, they should be reported on form "DipSW Report Sheet ", and sent to programme and liaison adviser/inspector.
- 14.4 External assessors may find instances of assessment practice which are good or which need improvement. They should be reported. Programmes and Council should be given clear recommendations for improvements in assessment practice.
- 14.5 The Council expects reports to be sent on time and to be of an appropriate standard. The responsibility for seeing that this expectation is met is located in the regulatory councils. Failure to report to time or to standard will lead to the use of the procedures described in section 17 of this manual under the heading "Unsatisfactory Work".

15.0 Attendance at Standardisation Meetings Organised by the GSCC

- 15.1 External assessors are expected to participate in a one-day standardisation event, aimed to ensure the maintenance of UK-wide standards. The sharing of experience will be an important ingredient of this annual event.
- 15.2 Where external assessors are invited to other Council-organised events, attendance will be at their own discretion.

16.0 Resignation of External Assessors

- 16.1 External assessors should give three months' notice of their intention to resign from their appointment to a particular programme. They may remain on the Council's Approved List and are eligible for appointment to another programme.
- 16.2 External assessors who wish to resign from the Approved List should state this clearly in their letter of resignation and give three months' notice.

17.0 Unsatisfactory Work

- 17.1 If an external assessor does not fulfil the conditions of appointment specified in this manual, or their suitability is called into question in other ways, the liaison adviser/inspector allocated to the programme will investigate and attempt to resolve the matter.
- 17.2 If the liaison adviser/inspector is unable to resolve the situation to the satisfaction of any of the parties concerned, the head of regional or national office will pursue the matter and seek resolution in consultation with the UK External Assessors Co-ordinator and other parties, to investigate and determine the issue.
- 17.3 Unsatisfactory work could result in termination of appointment to a programme or removal from the Approved List. This decision is made in consultation with all parties and guided by the use of procedures specified above. External assessors have a right of appeal to GSSC's Registrar.

18.0 Disputes between External Assessors and Programmes

- 18.1 External assessment involves the provision of information, judgement, advice and recommendations. Circumstances may occasionally arise which lead to dispute. The inspector/adviser allocated to the programme should be consulted in the first instance and if no resolution to the satisfaction of any of the parties can be found,

the Chief Executive/Head of Education and Training in each regulatory Council will pursue the matter. If it remains unresolved, depending on the nature of the dispute, either the inspection procedure may be instigated by the Council or the matter investigated to determine the issue. There is a right of appeal to GSCC's Registrar.

19.0 Information used by External Assessor

If for any reason external assessors feel that they need to check the status or content of information they receive from whatever source, they are advised to contact the liaison adviser/inspector.

20.0 Honorarium and Expenses

- 20.1 External assessors are paid an honorarium. Payments are subject to the receipt of an annual report.
- 20.2 The Council will also meet travel, subsistence and other expenses incurred in carrying out external assessor duties, which must be claimed for on the forms provided together with supporting evidence.
- 20.3 Claimable expenses are paid in accordance with the Council's policy as detailed in guidance notes issued from time to time to external assessors.

21.0 Insurance for External Assessors

Since external assessors are not employees of the Council, they are not covered by the Council's employer liability and are not insured for any risks associated with public liability.

22.0 Conditions of Appointment

- 22.1 Once appointment to the Approved List and to a programme is confirmed, the contents of the manual specify the conditions attached to these appointments.