# Assessor handbook - Certificates, assessors, academies and centers

BACK TO CONTENTS **[1]**

***Certificates, quality assurance and accreditation***

There are certificates at Bronze, Silver, Gold levels with a Platinum certificate planned. These levels are also referred to as Entry Level, Level 1, Level 2 and Level 3. The Bronze (Entry Level certificates are split into 3 sub-levels Bronze 1, Bronze 2 and Bronze 3 (Entry 1, Entry 2 and Entry 3). This gives 5 distinct levels of difficulty providing a low barrier to entry and support for progression for the full age and attainment range up to the level attained typically by 16 year olds engaged in full-time education. In ICT, many adults have had no formal education or training and so the certification is suitable for a wide range of adults as well as school aged children.

There are two fundamental certificate types. These are general certificates which can be awarded at any time at the discretion of the assessor based on matching the criteria and with locally agreed quality assurance procedures and "QCA accredited certificates" that carry the UK regulator's logo and are subject to the quality control procedures determined by the UK regulators. In some countries the UK regulator's accreditation is highly regarded, in others it might not be. By having two certificate types we can provide greater flexibility in the methods used in different circumstances in different countries. The intention is to achieve national government quality stamps in as many countries as possible for the accredited certificates as this will increase confidence and raise their value.

***Centers and Academies***

Certificates are Awarded by the Awarding Body and administered through INGOT Academies. Academies are provided with central support and quality assurance for accredited certification but they also have as much freedom and autonomy as possible in how they operate, reducing the administration overhead as far as possible and maximizing opportunities to motivate learners.

An Academy is a special type of Center that can benefit from economies of scale through an annual subscription that enables administration of an unlimited number of certificates to its clients. The Principal Assessor is trained to Bronze, Silver or Gold level and the Center level is restricted to the level of the Principal Assessor. The Principal Assessor is trained as an Assessor Trainer and can confer assessor status to colleagues in the Center up to the level of the Principal Assessor depending on the level that s/he is designated.

**Some examples:**

Gold Academy has a PA who is a Gold AT and trains 5 Assessors, 1 at Bronze Level, 2 at Silver and 2 at Gold. This Academy can administer an unlimited number of certificates at Bronze, Silver and Gold levels to its roll members. The only restriction is the quality assurance procedures required by the Awarding Body.

Bronze Center has a PA who is a Bronze AT and trains 2 Assessors at Bronze level to operate the Center. This Center administers an unlimited number of Bronze certificates to its roll members subject to conforming with the quality assurance required by the Awarding Body.

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Silver Academy has a PA who is a Gold AT and trains 1 Assessor at Bronze level. This Academy is restricted to issuing an unlimited number of Bronze and Silver certificates to its roll members, its Academy fee is the only thing restricting it from administering Gold level certificates.

#### *Audit trail and quality assurance*

All INGOT assessors are linked to "Academies" or "Centers" and all certificated candidates are linked to an assessor. This means that it is possible to determine where any certificate was issued and by whom and even who trained the person making the assessment. This is part of the quality assurance strategy. The INGOT certification site provides support for this through a custom designed data base. There is an on-line mark book enabling assessors to enter assessment data directly. The system then uses this data to determine when the candidate is ready for verification tests and tasks. Once this data is included and quality assurance sampling has taken place, the system allows certificates to be printed locally and authenticated easily directly from the web site.

#### *Costs*

The charge for certification varies in different countries as verification costs and other overheads are different in different economies. The intention is for the certification cost to be kept low by using more efficient methods backed by technology while maintaining educationally desirable features such as assessment for learning through dialogue between assessors and assessed, peer and self-assessment and short term target setting. If used to the full extent of the economies of scale typical costs should be significantly less than $5 per certificate and can be as low as $1. For details of costs contact your regional INGOT provider or sales@thelearningmachine.co.uk.

#### *Retests*

Awarding Body set tests and tasks are renewed every 2 months. A candidate can retake a test or task as long as it is not identical to a previously taken test/task. Re-takes should be a relatively rare event in that the criteria matching exercises are designed to reduce the numbers failing to achieve sufficient marks to pass the test or task.

#### *Use of the title INGOT Academy*

On registering with the annual payment method, Academies are authorized to use the appropriate title and The Learning Machine will supply a brass wall plaque to display their status. This is included in any annual fees for Academies that pay by this method.

#### *Quality Assurance and customer service*

This section is about maintaining standards both for the certificates and for the general management of the program. In this section the term Center will be used to apply to both Centers and Academies unless specifically indicated to the contrary.

The Learning Machine reserves the right to suspend status should a Center demonstrate inability to maintain standards or comply with the rules or in the judgment of the Chief Assessor is bringing the program into disrepute. There are more details about this and the complaints and appeals procedures in the documents "Policy and Procedures on Malpractice"; "Procedures for Making Inquiries and Appeals"; available from The Learning Machine Ltd.

### The importance of communications

Good communications is the key to ensuring consistent standards at all levels. This starts with the relationship between the assessor and candidate, communications between assessors and the

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Principal Assessor and communications between the Principal Assessor and the Awarding Body and its agents. New technologies have the capacity to vastly strengthen communications but there is still a significant role for conventional human relationships. Centers can expect occasional visits to verify and contribute to the improvement of the consistency of assessment and there will be training opportunities to update assessors and share professional views on standards. Assessors should communicate with their Principal Assessor in the Center in the first instance and use the web site forums to discuss assessment issues and to clarify any areas of doubt. Academies and assessors will be given a fair opportunity to put right any shortcomings as long as there is no malicious intent involved and good communications should minimize inconsistencies. The emphasis will be on development and improvement rather than simple fault finding. The Principal Assessor should maintain contact with their Account Manager in order to resolve any areas of uncertainty passing back information to assessors within the Center. The web-site is intended to provide a range of support from communication to courseware and learning resources. It is under continuing development and we will add useful facilities that are commonly in demand as resources allow.

***The Principal Assessor***

Each Center must have a single point of contact with The Learning Machine Ltd or its agents who is responsible for standards within the Center. This person will normally be the most experienced Assessor Trainer in the Center and must be an Assessor Trainer at least of the level at which the Center is operating. This person is the Center's Principal Assessor. The Principal Assessor will have direct contact with a named Account Manager from The Learning Machine or its agents. In the first instance any queries, problems or issues should be taken up with the Account Manager by making initial E-mail contact. The Account Manager will visit the Center occasionally to provide support and to sample the work in addition to the samples sent by E-mail or made available on-line or by other methods. Further visits might be necessary if there are issues related to standards and the Account Manager can insist that Assessors or Assessor Trainers attend additional training in order for the Center to keep its registration. These situations are expected to be rare. The Center must have sufficient technological infrastructure to enable it to provide appropriate access to relevant applications for candidates in order that they can be assessed fairly.

Principal Assessors must complete a web site form on behalf of the Center agreeing to allow the Account Manager access to working candidates and their work, that the Center has an equal opportunities policy consistent with that of the Awarding Body, and that the Center has internal quality assurance procedures consistent with those of the Awarding Body. This form is available on the web site when the Principal Assessor logs in.

As a minimum, the Center must

- Have the technical infrastructure to provide adequate support for the awards.
- Have an Equal Opportunities Policy that conforms to current legislation.
- Have internal moderation procedures to compare assessors' interpretation of criteria.
- Notify the Awarding Body of any disputes with candidates over assessment and the reasons.
- Notify the Awarding Body if they propose any adjustments e.g. for candidates with disabilities (The Awarding Body will provide full details of what is allowable on request) The Center should E-mail ian.lynch@thelearningmachine.co.uk with any proposed adjustments giving details of the proposals and the reasons for them. These will be considered and a reply provided within 24 hours with the aim of a decision within that time. A final decision might take longer if more information is needed. The Chief Executive will provide written E-mail confirmation of the action to be taken and the details of the correspondence and decision will be stored in the Center's file. The Center can appeal any decision and provide additional

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information to support its case. This appeal will be finally arbitrated by the Awards Committee of the Management Board who will provide a collective decision within 2 weeks.

- Use only official Awarding Body stationery to print QCA accredited certificates (requirement of the Regulatory Authorities)
- Keep any certificate stationery in a secure place (requirement of the Regulatory Authorities)
- Keep any assessment instruments secure and use them only in the ways specified by the Awarding Body.

The Management Board of the Learning Machine Ltd will be the final arbiters in any disputes over quality and standards. The Management Board has the power to suspend Assessors and Assessor Trainers and revoke a Center's license to run the program. These powers are a last resort and every effort will be made to work co-operatively and constructively with Centers to ensure standards through a supportive ethos.

***Criteria Matching***

The assessment criteria are the central focus for gauging attainment. Every unit has indicative criteria that the assessor uses in collaboration with the learner to provide the benchmarks for specific outcomes in the learning process. There are various ways of doing this. The learners can self and peer assess against the criteria as a starting point. This supports learning how to learn by involving the learner in the assessment process. The assessor manages the process by agreeing the learners' judgements or otherwise. The program allows each of the criteria to be scored 0,1 or 2. Zero if the candidate has yet to show any evidence of competence against the criteria, 1 if the candidate can match the criterion with support and 2 if the candidate is self-sufficient. There is guidance for assessors in this handbook to help them interpret the detail and expectations for each of the criteria. How the Assessor decides to award a 0,1 or 2 is left to the Center and the professional judgment of the Assessors. Externally set tasks and tests are then used to verify the assessors' judgements. The system is designed to enhance motivation for the learner by involving them in short term target setting and screening them for suitability to take more formal tests. It should be rare for a candidate to fail a test or task since the criteria matching process should ensure that they are properly prepared. The tests and tasks act as a quality assurance feedback for assessors to enable them to check that they are setting an appropriate level of expectation in the course. The criteria are written so that they can fit most ICT courses leading to basic competency and therefore provide the flexibility to fit most mainstream provision in most countries.

The entire assessment process is supported by a web based on-line mark book which will use the data entered by the assessor to decide when the candidate is ready for an Awarding Body set test or task and what level of certificate they have achieved. The mark book is linked to the technology that supports the awarding and printing of certificates locally. The use of this as part of the certification web site enables the Awarding Body, Principal Assessor, Assessors and learners to collaborate effectively in the assessment process.

***Controlled testing***

The Awarding Body set tests and tasks should be performed in controlled conditions. They are short and should be no more administrative overhead than the usual diagnostic testing that teachers carry out in the normal course of things. The candidate should work unaided and supervised to check that the criteria matching has been reliable. The supervisor can read questions to candidates. There is no time limit but mostly tasks or sets of tasks should be completed within an hour and in most cases considerably less. This makes it possible to administer tests in normal teaching time much as teachers would administer periodic diagnostic tests.

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***Languages***

The definitive version of the criteria for certification is the English version printed in the English version of the handbook. All translations are derived directly from this version and are provided by native speakers of the target language with a good command of English and who are at least technologically capable at Gold level. This is to ensure that the performance expectation is consistent across all languages. We are always keen to support new languages. The tasks needed are to translate the web site pages and the handbook so while not insignificant, its the sort of task an individual could realistically attempt.

BACK TO CONTENTS **[1]**

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**Links**
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