

Guide to Assessment and Quality Assurance for Secondary Schools

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Contents

Section A: Introduction

About this guide	3
About SQA	3
About SQA qualifications	4
Terminology	4
The Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework	4

Section B: Assessment and quality assurance

1 Overview of assessment	7
Modes of assessment	7
Internal assessment	7
External assessment	8
How we use internal and external assessment	8
Principles of assessment	8
Validity of assessment	8
Practicability	9
Reliability	9
2 Overview of quality assurance	10
Quality assurance principles and elements	10
Quality assurance principles	10
Quality assurance elements	10
The elements	11
How quality assurance is carried out	11
Approval as an SQA centre	11
Approval to offer specific qualifications	11
Validation of SQA qualifications	11
Authorisation of general Scottish Group Awards	12
Internal moderation/verification	12
External moderation	12
External assessment	12
3 Validating SQA qualifications	13
Introduction	13
Validation criteria	13
Proposing and developing new qualifications	13
Validating National and Higher National Qualifications	13
Phasing out SQA qualifications	14
4 Approval	15
Initial approval	15
Approval to offer specific SQA qualifications	15
National Qualifications developed under Higher Still	15
List A: Automatic approval	17
List B: Approval required from SQA	18
5 Internal assessment and (internal) moderation	19
Assessment moderation	19

Internal assessment	19
Internal moderation	19
1 Assessment specification: content and standards	20
2 Selecting an instrument of assessment and devising the assessment task	20
Integrated assessment	21
3 The responses or solutions expected	21
4 Vetting the assessment and associated assessment scheme	22
5 Assessing candidate evidence	22
Conditions for assessment	23
Authentication	23
6 Checking the consistency of assessment decisions	25
How to avoid assessor bias	25
7 Recording your assessment decisions	26
Re-assessment	26
Re-assessment in specific qualifications	27
8 Forwarding results to SQA, and maintaining assessment records	27
6 Internal assessment and external moderation	28
Introduction	28
Types of moderation	28
How central moderation works	28
Prior moderation	29
Selection of centres for moderation	29
External moderation of National Courses	30
Entry information	30
Centre selection	30
Candidate sampling	30
Timing of moderation	31
Arrangements for visiting moderation	31
Completion dates	31
Retrospective moderation	31
Ephemeral candidate evidence	32
Arrangements for central/postal moderation	32
Completion dates	32
Units as components of a Course	32
Stand-alone Units	33
Postal moderation	33
National Course assessments	33
Central/postal moderation dates	33
Retention of evidence	34
Summary of the moderation process	34
Step-by-step guide to external moderation	35
7 External assessment	36
Introduction	36
Entering candidates for qualifications	36
Producing assessment instruments and assessment schemes	36
Written examinations or tests (question papers)	37
Projects or coursework (including investigations, assignments, dissertations and case studies)	37

Oral assessments/tests and observation of performance/skill demonstrations	38
Establishing conditions under which assessments take place	38
Written examinations or tests — conditions	39
Project-type assessments	40
Authentication of project work	40
Oral assessments and assessments carried out through observation of performance	40
Taking centres' judgements into account	41
Assessing candidates' evidence	42
Your role: managing the assessment process	42
Preparing candidates for assessment	42
Candidates with special assessment requirements	42
Managing external written examinations or tests (question papers)	42
SQA Invigilators	42
Managing oral assessments or tests, or observation of performance or skill demonstrations	43
Managing projects or course-work	43
Re-submission of project work	43
SQA's role: arriving at assessment decisions	43
Arriving at preliminary assessment decisions	44
Arriving at interim assessment decisions	45
Arriving at final assessment decisions	45
Links between internal and external Assessment	46
8 Special assessment and certification arrangements	48
Introduction	48
Principles of special assessment arrangements	48
General guidance on special assessment arrangements	48
Special arrangements for internal assessment	49
Special arrangements for external assessment	49
Information technology in assessments	49
General guidance on special certification arrangements	49
9 Quality auditing	50
Devolved authority	50

Section C: More about SQA qualifications

1 National Qualifications	53
National Units	53
Features of National Units	53
Requirements of National Units	53
The National Assessment Bank	54
Devising your own assessment for National Units	54
National Clusters 2 and 3	54
National Courses	54
Features of National Courses	54
Hierarchies	54
Requirements of National Courses (Course assessments)	55

Estimating attainment in National Courses	55
Scottish Group Awards	56
Features of Scottish Group Awards	56
Authorisation of general Scottish Group Awards	56
Requirements of Scottish Group Awards	57
Other National Qualifications	58
SQA qualifications which are being replaced or renamed	58
Achieving Core Skills	59
Core Skills in SGAs	59
Standard Grades	60
Core Skills in SVQs	60
Higher National Certificates and Higher National Diplomas	60

Section D: Appeals and equal opportunities

The appeals policy and process	63
Equal opportunities policy for SQA in its awarding body role	64
Background	64
Equal opportunities policy statement	64
A note for candidates	65
Action to monitor the policy and its implementation	65
Guidelines for setters of assessment tasks	66
Checklist for checking cultural, racial or religious bias in assessment tasks	66
Guidelines for setters of assessment tasks	68
Checklist for gender bias in assessment tasks/items	68

Section A: Introduction

About this guide

This guide to Assessment and Quality Assurance for SQA qualifications takes you through the whole process of offering our qualifications, from start to finish. It explains our policies, and the reasons for them, and tells you what we expect you to do to comply with them. It is a pulling-together of information on current procedures and best practice.

About SQA

The Scottish Qualifications Authority is the national body in Scotland for the development, accreditation, assessment, and certification of qualifications other than degrees. It is responsible to the Scottish Executive and aims to be self-financing.

SQA's functions are to:

- ◆ devise, develop and validate qualifications, and keep them under review
- ◆ approve education and training establishments as being suitable for entering people for these qualifications
- ◆ arrange for, assist in, and carry out, the assessment of candidates taking SQA qualifications
- ◆ quality assure education and training establishments which offer SQA qualifications
- ◆ certificate candidates' results

Our qualifications are delivered in schools, colleges, workplaces and at other training establishments, and cover the whole range of academic and vocational subjects.

The qualifications fall into three main families:

National Courses are currently under review following initial implementation. See under National Qualifications Review at www.sqa.org.uk for more information.

- ◆ **National Qualifications**
Delivered mainly in schools and colleges. These qualifications are at five levels: Access, Intermediate 1 and 2, Higher and Advanced Higher. There are also Scottish Group Awards which are recognised groupings of these Units and Courses. Standard Grade Courses (on which the new Intermediate Courses are benchmarked) will remain.
- ◆ **Higher National qualifications**
Mainly delivered in colleges, Higher National Certificates (HNCs) and Higher National Diplomas (HNDs) are Unit-based qualifications which are typically studied over one or two years, but are increasingly being offered on a part-time basis.
- ◆ **Scottish Vocational Qualifications**
Delivered in workplaces, or in workplace conditions, SVQs are Unit-based qualifications which recognise competence in a job role. SQA has informed centres of the availability of Scottish Progression Awards (SPAs). These are a way of showing that candidates have completed a programme of personal development to national standards. However, they are primarily intended as stepping stones to full SVQs, and will be attractive to adult returners and New Deal clients. They are currently available in six occupational areas.

About SQA qualifications

SQA awards a broad range of qualifications designed to be taken in schools, in colleges or universities, in the workplace, or through training providers. They cover an array of knowledge and skills in subjects from, for example, languages and mathematics to care and agriculture. SQA qualifications use both external and internal assessment, and our quality assurance systems reflect this.

Terminology

We use the term *Unit* primarily to include National Units, Higher National Units, and Scottish Vocational Units.

The term *National Course* refers primarily to the Courses developed under Higher Still: namely Intermediate 1, Intermediate 2, Higher and Advanced Higher.

Where a centre is found, through moderation, to be applying the national standard to a Unit, its assessments will be *accepted* and it will be an *accepted centre* for that Unit.

Candidate *entry* is the term used for the process of telling SQA: which candidates are undertaking what, where and when (ie identifying the qualification and level); the centre's details; and when the qualification will be completed.

The Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework

The Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) is a new way of understanding qualifications in Scotland. Its main purpose is to make the relationships between qualifications clearer. This, in turn, will make progression and transfer between qualifications easier.

The framework describes all Scottish qualifications in terms of their level and credit value:

- ◆ The level says how hard the qualification is to achieve. There are 12 levels, from level 1 for Access 1 to level 12 for doctorates.
- ◆ The credit value — the number of points a qualification has — says how big the qualification is, in other words how much it is worth. One point represents a notional 10 hours of effort by the learner.

For more information on the SCQF, contact Lorraine Judge, SCQF Development Officer.
Telephone: 0141-242 2429; e-mail: lorraine.judge@sqa.org.uk or l.judge@qaa.ac.uk

Section B: Assessment and quality assurance

1 Overview of assessment

As an organisation serving many of the educational and training needs of the people of Scotland, we are committed to working with the following organisations to provide candidates with the qualifications they need:

- ◆ schools
- ◆ colleges of further and higher education
- ◆ universities
- ◆ private training providers
- ◆ employers
- ◆ Sector Skills Councils
- ◆ voluntary organisations
- ◆ community education providers

One of the most important factors contributing to public confidence in qualifications is the quality of the assessments which candidates undertake to achieve them. In SQA, we strive to ensure that our assessment process is both rigorous and fair, and that assessment tasks are appropriate to the national standards defined within each qualification.

What we mean by assessment is measuring the evidence of a candidate's attainment of knowledge and skills against defined criteria.

These are some of the methods by which we make sure that the system used for assessing our qualifications is credible, cost-effective, and valued:

- ◆ validating the standards for qualifications through consultation with stakeholders
- ◆ ensuring that assessments are well-designed, consistently applied, and allow candidates to show that they are able to meet qualification standards
- ◆ underpinning all assessment by a coherent and effective system of quality assurance

Modes of assessment

The work which candidates produce in response to assessment tasks for all of our qualifications is assessed either internally, or externally, or through a combination of both.

Internal assessment

This is where staff in centres are responsible for deciding how candidates have performed in relation to the standards for the qualification. This is done either by applying assessment tasks which have been devised by staff in the centre (or in a consortium of centres), or by applying assessments which we, the national assessment body, have devised. An example of the former is where a lecturer uses an assessment which has been devised in consultation with colleagues to assess candidates' performance in a Higher National Unit. An example of the latter is where a teacher applies an assessment from the National Assessment Bank (NAB), which has been devised by SQA, for a National Unit.

In internal assessment, centres are responsible for assessing candidates work in line with our guidance and subject to our quality assurance processes. Centres are also responsible for submitting candidates' results to us.

External assessment

This is where SQA is responsible for devising and marking assessments. Staff in education and training centres are responsible for administering the assessments in the centre in accordance with our guidelines.

How we use internal and external assessment

The use of internal and external assessment varies across the qualification families. Currently, Higher National qualifications (HNCs and HNDs) and Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQs) are internally assessed and externally moderated. Both qualification families are in the process of being reviewed (see the relevant sections of this guide).

Modes of assessment for National Qualifications:

Qualification	Mode of assessment
Standard Grade	internal and external
Access 1, 2 and 3 Clusters and Group Awards	internal
Intermediate 1 and 2 Courses and Group Awards	internal and external
Higher Courses and Group Awards	internal and external
Advanced Higher Courses and Group Awards	internal and external

Principles of assessment

In common with all assessing and awarding bodies, we strive to ensure that assessment of our qualifications is *valid*, *reliable* and *practicable*. We also aim to make it flexible and cost-effective.

In order to maintain rigorous and credible national standards, all assessments must be valid and assessment decisions reliable. Centres should also ensure that the application of assessment tasks is practicable, ie they make best use of human and physical resources and time.

Awarding bodies must also ensure that any national assessment system is based on design rules which facilitate a coherent and consistent approach.

Validity of assessment

Each assessment — whether it's a written question paper or a project brief — should be designed in such a way that it provides candidates with an opportunity to produce the evidence that shows they have the knowledge and skills to satisfy the requirements of the qualification.

An assessment is valid when it:

- ◆ is appropriate to purpose (eg a practical assessment should be used to assess practical skills)
- ◆ allows the production of evidence of candidates' performance which can be measured against standards defined within the qualification
- ◆ allows candidates to produce sufficient evidence of all the skills and knowledge required to satisfy standards within the qualification
- ◆ facilitates the making of reliable assessment decisions by all assessors for all candidates
- ◆ is accessible to all candidates who are potentially able to achieve it

Practicability

For assessments to be practicable (ie capable of being carried out both efficiently and cost-effectively) there has to be adequate resources and time. Examples of this are:

- ◆ in the context of oral assessments or interviews, balancing the need for assessment reliability with considerations of staff and candidate time and potential stress
- ◆ in the context of assessing practical skills, bearing in mind any resource implications
- ◆ an assessment system with the flexibility to meet the needs of all candidates

Reliability

To be reliable, assessment decisions (based on standards in a qualification) on candidates' performance must be consistent across all assessors and all candidates undertaking the same assessment task. In any assessment system, procedures have to be put in place to ensure this.

Assessment decisions are reliable when they are based on evidence that is:

- ◆ generated by valid assessments generated under consistently-applied conditions of assessment (eg open-book, supervised or invigilated)
- ◆ the authenticated work of the candidates being assessed

and when they are:

- ◆ taken on the basis of clearly-defined performance and/or grade-related criteria
- ◆ consistent across the range of assessors applying the assessment in different situations, contexts and with different candidates
- ◆ consistent over time

2 Overview of quality assurance

A key objective of SQA's quality assurance procedures is to ensure that the assessment of our qualifications is valid and reliable — ie that candidates who have shown that they can meet the standards of a qualification receive certificates, and that those who have not, do not. This has to be achieved in a practical and cost-effective manner so that quality assurance does not become a burden to our centres. The quality assurance procedures must also ensure that standards are consistent over time for all qualifications.

Quality assurance principles and elements

Quality assurance principles

SQA quality assurance is based on the following principles:

- ◆ the SQA assessment and quality assurance system should be understandable to stakeholders, effectively administered, publicly accountable and cost-effective to operate
- ◆ qualifications should be accessible to all candidates who have the potential to achieve them
- ◆ the criteria which define the performance required of candidates if they are to achieve qualifications should be appropriate to purpose, explicit, and in the public domain
- ◆ each Unit, Course, and Group Award should be unique and necessary, and should comply with the specification for the qualification
- ◆ assessments should be valid, reliable and practicable, and assessment results should be in line with the criteria for the qualification
- ◆ qualifications should be offered in centres which have the resources and expertise to assess candidates against the qualification's criteria
- ◆ staff in centres should be provided with effective support in assessing candidates for certification
- ◆ responsibility for quality assurance should be devolved to centres where this is consistent with the maintenance of national standards

Quality assurance elements

To ensure that the qualifications SQA offers are designed, delivered and assessed to acceptable national standards, we have set out a number of quality assurance elements, which are based on the quality assurance principles. These elements underpin all SQA qualifications, and underpin the quality assurance mechanisms through which national standards are established and maintained.

Each element covers an area of assessment or quality assurance, and is divided into requirements or criteria. The criteria set out the corresponding responsibilities of SQA and its centres.

Responsibility for some of the elements can be devolved to centres which have the necessary resources and can meet the quality standards required.

The elements

Element:

- ◆ approval as an SQA centre
- ◆ approval to offer specific SQA qualifications
- ◆ validation of SQA qualifications
- ◆ internal moderation of internal assessment
- ◆ external moderation of internal assessment
- ◆ quality control of external assessment
- ◆ monitoring of SQA's quality assurance

The criteria cover:

the management procedures which underpin the implementation and assessment of SQA qualifications in centres

resources required of centres for the implementation and assessment of specific SQA qualifications

ensuring that SQA qualifications are fit for purpose

the processes by which centres ensure that all internal assessment is valid and reliable

external processes by which SQA ensures that internal assessment is in line with the national standards set out in the qualifications

the process by which SQA and centres ensure that external assessment is in line with the national standards set out in the qualifications

the processes which are used to measure the success of the other elements in supporting the consistent application of national standards

There is more detail in the SQA publication *Quality Assurance Principles, Elements and Criteria* (A0798, December 1998) which is available from SQA's Customer Contact Centre — 0141-242 2214.

How quality assurance is carried out in secondary schools: overview

Approval as an SQA centre

Education authority schools receive centre approval automatically, as the education authority is obliged to ensure that minimum standards of resourcing are attained and all teachers have to be registered with the General Teaching Council. Independent schools fully registered with the Scottish Executive Education Department (SEED) also enjoy approved status. Any new independent school would require approval — this would generally be done through the school's registration with SEED.

Approval to offer specific qualifications

If your school wishes to offer a qualification in an area in which it has no experience, there may be specialist skills or equipment required, or a specific learning environment. In such instances you will need approval to offer the qualification. The completion of a form will normally be sufficient, though an approval visit may take place if we need more information.

Validation of SQA qualifications

Schools, for the most part, will be delivering National Units and Courses which are developed and validated nationally. Responsibility for validating named Scottish Group Awards (SGAs) based on nationally-validated Units, Courses and Clusters may be devolved to schools whose systems meet the criteria for this element (see the list, above). However, we expect that schools' involvement in validation will focus on their willingness to release staff on request to serve national development groups, and to respond to consultation on proposals for introducing new qualifications or revising existing ones.

Authorisation of general Scottish Group Awards

Where a school wishes to offer a general Scottish Group Award, the proposed combination of Units and Courses must be authorised by SQA as a valid route. This is to ensure that the proposed SGA is coherent and offers progression possibilities. The SQA guide *General SGAs: Authorisation* (A0877, October 1999) gives further details of procedures. Copies are available from SQA's Customer Contact Centre — 0141-242 2214.

Internal moderation/verification

Schools are responsible for the internal moderation of their internal assessments. It is important that schools ensure that internal assessments and estimates are made in a consistent manner. We will assume that all candidates in your school who are entered for the same qualification are assessed to a common standard — which means that you will have to apply methods of ensuring that your assessments are consistent.

It is also important that any new member of staff has access to all the relevant SQA documentation. Where external moderation across the school reveals a significant problem with your assessments, we may look into the way your internal moderation is being carried out.

External moderation

External moderation follows the principles and procedures which SQA consulted on early in 1998. The system involves both visiting and central (including postal) moderation.

External moderation focuses on the validity and reliability of your school's assessments. For National Units, the emphasis will be on holistic assessment at Unit or Outcome level (where this is specified). Schools will be offered development visits, as far as resources allow. A separate charge will be made for these, but we will not charge for moderation visits we have instigated. There is more information in our publication *External Assessment Moderation in National Qualifications and Higher National qualifications: a guide for centres* (AA0892/2, December 2001) available from SQA's Customer Contact Centre — 0141-242 2214.

The National Assessment Bank instruments should enhance the validity and reliability of internal assessment of the National Units covered by the bank. This resource, coupled with the use of external assessment, will allow lighter moderation of these Units.

External assessment

External assessment can take the form of written, oral, or practical assessments, and there is a variety of assessment instruments, including question papers and projects.

The conduct of national examinations requires a high degree of organisation and preparation. Most of this is our responsibility, but centres have an important role to play in submitting estimates and entering candidates at the appropriate Course level.

You will have to arrange accommodation for large numbers of students sitting examinations, and you will be expected to co-operate in special assessment arrangements, and procedures for absentees and assessment appeals.

The production by candidates of folios or projects outwith the examination room demands different quality assurance measures — these are designed to ensure that the work is the candidate's own. Your school will already be familiar with these requirements, but the emphasis on supervised 'write-ups' will increase.

3 Validating SQA qualifications

Introduction

Before they can be offered by centres, all SQA qualifications first have to go through a process of development and quality checking. Only then can they be included in the appropriate SQA catalogue. We call this quality assurance process validation. Its principal aim is to ensure that SQA qualifications are of a high standard, and meet the educational and training needs of the wider community.

Validation criteria

All newly-developed or updated qualifications are vetted against SQA's clearly-defined validation criteria — which are in the public domain — to ensure that they meet our requirements. SQA validates Scottish Vocational Qualifications (as well as National and Higher National qualifications) before proceeding to accreditation.

Proposing and developing new qualifications

Proposals for new National Qualifications and Higher National qualifications can come about in one of two ways:

- ◆ from SQA, as part of our annual planning cycle, in response to the expressed needs of stakeholders
- ◆ from centres, (individually or in groups) in response to their own perceived needs

For this we draw on the expertise of subject specialists from across Scotland. All of the development work is overseen by SQA, which also manages the validation process.

Validating National Qualifications and Higher National qualifications

The validation system is based on an evaluation of the proposal against the validation criteria and is operated under the general supervision of SQA's Advisory Group structure. SQA's Advisory Group structure draws on a wide range of interested parties. The school sector is well represented.

Validation will be used in a range of circumstances, including the:

- ◆ addition of a new or updated/revised National Unit
- ◆ addition of a small number of Units/Courses to an existing options list (SGAs)
- ◆ addition of a new options list (SGAs)
- ◆ introduction of changes to the mandatory section, eg the replacement of Units/Courses with alternatives for SGAs
- ◆ introduction of new titles combining areas of study covered by existing qualifications
- ◆ introduction of new specialisms within families
- ◆ introduction of entirely new titles which do not fit any of the existing families

The degree of change increases as you move down the list. An efficient validation system must allow a flexible response to the size and complexity of proposed change. The most straightforward changes, such as the addition of options to an existing qualification, would normally be put into effect by our officers (subject to any necessary consultation with stakeholders). More significant changes, such as the introduction of a new qualification, would require a full validation panel

meeting to consider the proposal and the evidence to support it. The panel would be drawn from our stakeholders.

For National Qualifications, a validation panel would often include:

- ◆ teachers/lecturers
- ◆ representatives of user groups such as higher education and employers
- ◆ professional bodies
- ◆ Sector Skills Councils
- ◆ others appropriate to the qualifications concerned

SEED would also be asked to be represented at the panel or to send comments. Panels may be larger if a greater range of expertise is required, but should not be smaller. In the interests of objectivity, no member of the qualification development team can be a member of the validation panel nor, with the exception of the centre representative, should panel members have any formal connection with the centres involved in the development. Members of a consortium should nominate one person to represent their interests.

The validation documentation required would vary depending on the degree of change proposed. For example, a proposal for adding a single optional Unit to an existing SGA would require little more than a statement of the rationale. On the other hand, a full specification with supporting evidence would be required for a new SGA — for example, evidence of support from centres likely to deliver the qualification or use it for progression purposes, and of those employers likely to use it for recruitment.

When it has been successfully validated, the qualification is then entered into SQA's framework of qualifications and is available for centres to use.

Authority for validating named SGAs based on nationally-validated Units and Courses may be devolved to schools whose systems meet the criteria for the quality assurance element validation of SQA qualifications. See section 9, 'Quality auditing' page 50 for more details.

Phasing out SQA qualifications

There is an agreed system for phasing out old qualifications, where validation is intended to replace an existing qualification. This system allows for a lapsing period during which, although an old qualification is not widely publicised, it is still available for entry and certification. The lapsing process ensures that candidates who started programmes of Units have sufficient time to complete them (including remediation where necessary) using the old version of the Units or Group Awards.

4 Approval

There are two types of approval: initial approval as an SQA centre, and approval to offer specific SQA qualifications.

Initial approval

All secondary schools in Scotland which are fully registered with the SOEID and schools in the rest of the United Kingdom which are fully registered with the relevant education body normally already have initial approval as an SQA centre.

For schools outwith the United Kingdom, there may be some degree of credit transfer from your status as an approved centre within your own educational system. Our decision on whether to conduct further quality checks will partly depend on our familiarity with your education system. Please telephone our Approval Section on +44 (0) 141-242 2121/2122 for details.

Approval to offer specific SQA qualifications

National Qualifications

We try to make the system as straightforward and inclusive as possible.

At the end of this section there are two lists of qualifications in the National Qualifications family. The first list (List A) shows the qualifications for which your school already has approval on the basis of a direct match between current and former qualifications. We have already approved your school for all the qualifications on this list, and have amended our records accordingly. This does not apply to special schools which are processed individually, on the basis of their application for approval.

The second list (List B) shows those qualifications for which, if your school wishes to offer them, you will have to seek approval from us. These qualifications (for example National Units in Care or Mechanical Engineering) are likely to be new to schools, and have specific staffing and resourcing requirements which will need to be considered. The form you should use if you want to request approval for any qualifications in List B has already been sent to your school, and further copies are available from our Approval Section — 0141-242 2121.

The approval process for the qualifications in List B is based on the principle that if your school has offered qualifications like these in the past, and we can match these to National Qualifications, then we can grant approval automatically. For example, if you have previously offered a GSVQ (or a cluster of modules) in a particular subject area and you tell us this, we may be able to decide that this was of a similar level and depth to the new qualifications and approve your school to offer them.

If your evidence of a previous track record in a qualification area is light, or if you have never offered qualifications in the area concerned before, we may want to investigate further before making a decision on approval. We will want information about the qualifications and experience of those who will be assessing and internally moderating the new Units and Courses, and we will also ask for details of the resources (eg equipment, accommodation and reference materials) you intend to use to support assessment.

If, when we consider the information you have provided on your form, we are satisfied that the staffing and resourcing issues have been addressed, we will be able to approve your centre on the basis of the information supplied. We will only seek further information from you (or even ask an external moderator to visit your school) where the information is incomplete or unclear, or it leads

us to the view that your school might have difficulty in offering the qualification in question. If a visit is necessary, we will arrange for this to take place as soon as possible after you have submitted the form. We will use the external moderator's report on the visit to inform our decision about approval.

Whatever the outcome, we will inform you in writing of our decision.

For all other National Units which you wish to offer and do not currently have approval for, please provide us with the details on the approval request form.

At some stage, you may wish to enter candidates for qualifications taken from the Higher National or SVQ qualification families, and again there could be staffing and resourcing issues to consider. You should contact our Approval Section on 0141-242 2121/2122 and they will advise you how to proceed with your application for approval.

List A: Automatic approval

X = Denotes levels at which courses are available

National Courses and Clusters and Core Skills Units by level

Subject	Acc 2	Acc 3	Int 1	Int 2	Higher	AH
Accounting and Finance			X	X	X	X
Administration			X	X	X	X
Applied Mathematics						X
Art and Design	X	X	X	X	X	X
Biology		X	X	X	X	X
Business	X	X				
Business Management			X	X	X	X
Chemistry		X	X	X	X	X
Classical Greek			X	X	X	X
Classical Studies			X	X	X	X
Computing	X	X	X	X	X	X
Core Skills Units	X	X	X	X	X	
Craft and Design				X	X	X
Drama	X	X	X	X	X	X
Economics			X	X	X	X
Electronic and Electrical Fundamentals				X		
Personal and Social Education	X	X	X	X	X	
Engineering Craft Skills			X	X		
English	X	X	X	X	X	X
Enterprise through Craft	X	X				
Fashion and Textile Technology		X	X	X	X	X
French	X	X	X	X	X	X
Gaelic		X	X	X	X	X
Gàidhlig	X	X	X	X	X	X
General Operations				X		
Geography			X	X	X	X
Geology		X	X	X	X	
German	X	X	X	X	X	X
Graphic Communication				X	X	X
Health and Food Technology		X	X	X	X	X
History			X	X	X	X
Home Economics	X					
Human Biology					X	
Information Systems				X	X	X
Italian	X	X	X	X	X	X
Latin			X	X	X	X
Lifestyle and Consumer Technology		X	X	X	X	X
Managing Environmental Resources	X	X	X	X	X	X
Mathematics	X	X	X	X	X	X
Modern Studies			X	X	X	X
Music	X	X	X	X	X	X
Personal Care	X					
Philosophy				X	X	X
Physical Education	X	X	X	X	X	X
Physics		X	X	X	X	X
Politics			X	X	X	X
Practical Cookery				X		
Psychology			X	X	X	X
RMPS	X	X	X	X	X	X

Russian	X	X	X	X	X	X
Science	X					
Social Subjects	X	X				
Sociology			X	X	X	X
Spanish	X	X	X	X	X	X
Structures				X		
Technological Studies				X	X	X
Travel and Tourism			X	X		
Woodworking Skills			X	X		

List B: Approval required from SQA

X = Denotes levels at which courses are available

National Courses and Clusters by level

Subject	Acc 2	Acc 3	Int 1	Int 2	Higher	AH
Automotive Engineering					X	
Biotechnology				X	X	
Building and Architectural Technology					X	X
Building Services					X	
Care			X	X	X	
Civil Engineering					X	X
Construction					X	
Electrical Engineering					X	
Electronics					X	X
Fabrication and Welding Engineering					X	
Food and Drink Service					X	
Land Use (Built Environment)					X	
Manufacturing					X	X
Mechanical Engineering					X	
Mechatronics					X	X
Media Studies	X	X	X	X	X	
Professional Cookery				X	X	
Reception and Accommodation Operations				X	X	
Retail Travel					X	X
Tourism					X	X

5 Internal assessment and (internal) moderation

Assessment moderation

Any national system of assessment must have effective checks and balances in place to ensure that consistent and accurate standards are being applied and maintained. Internal assessment is quality assured by means of a process called **assessment moderation**. This focuses on:

- ◆ validity of assessment instruments
- ◆ practicability of assessment instruments
- ◆ reliability of assessment decisions
- ◆ consistency of the quality of assessment practices within centres over time

There are two parts to assessment moderation: external and internal. SQA manages the external moderation part, further information about which can be found in section B6 of this guide and in our publication *External Assessment Moderation in National Qualifications and Higher National qualifications: a guide for centres* (AA0892/2, December 2001) available from SQA's Customer Contact Centre — 0141-242 2214. Internal moderation is the part of this crucial quality assurance process that is managed by centres.

Internal assessment

Internal assessment is where a centre decides whether candidates have achieved the standards set for the qualification which they are attempting. The centre can do this by applying assessments devised in centres or assessments developed by SQA, such as an assessment for a National Unit taken from the National Assessment Bank (NAB). As with external assessment, internal assessment must be valid, reliable and practicable if centres are to maintain rigorous national standards of assessment and SQA is to provide credible qualifications.

Internal moderation

SQA qualifications which are wholly, or partly, internally assessed are subject to a quality assurance process called **internal moderation**. This is an element of our quality assurance framework and is designed to ensure that centres are making consistent and accurate assessment decisions in accordance with the assessment criteria defined within our qualifications. Our publication *Quality Assurance Principles, Elements and Criteria* (A0798, December 1998) sets out the broad criteria for internal moderation we expect of centres. Copies are available from SQA's Customer Contact Centre — 0141-242 2214.

Our quality assurance criteria clearly define quality assurance as a partnership between SQA and centres, but ownership for this quality element is very much in the hands of centres. SQA assumes that, where candidates are entered for a qualification, consistent and accurate standards of assessment are being applied to all. Unless our system of external moderation reveals a significant problem or inconsistencies with candidates' results, we will assume that internal moderation is being carried out effectively in centres.

Following the steps (numbered 1–8) we have outlined on the following pages should ensure that your internal assessments, and the internal moderation process which supports them, are carried out successfully.

An outcome of successful internal moderation is that centres avoid the scenario where an inexperienced member of staff is responsible for devising and/or applying internal assessments and/or making assessment decisions without the assessment process being subject to wider scrutiny, expertise and endorsement within the centre.

1 Assessment specification: content and standards

An important element of valid and reliable assessment is knowledge of what is required by national standards. SQA qualifications provide details of the evidence candidates have to produce and in what contexts. For example, where standards specify the knowledge evidence that is required, you should select an assessment instrument best suited to generating this type of evidence, such as a project, a test of knowledge, or a personal statement by the candidate.

You should become familiar with the documents which set out the information about the evidence your candidates must be able to generate. This information can be found in, for example, National Course Arrangement documents, and the Evidence Requirements section of Unit specifications. All of this information is available from SQA's website: www.sqa.org.uk.

2 Selecting an instrument of assessment and devising the assessment task

Where an assessment for a National Unit is chosen from the National Assessment Bank (NAB), subject experts have devised and vetted both it and its marking schemes or solutions. You will be responsible for ensuring that these are applied correctly, and for making and recording the assessment decisions. The advantage of using NAB instruments is that their validity has been confirmed and they come complete with assessment schemes (ie 'marking instructions').

If your centre wishes to devise its own instruments of assessment for National Units, you may request prior moderation of your assessments. We don't need to check minor amendments to NAB instruments.

For all other SQA qualifications, you should identify the skills candidates have to demonstrate, and the knowledge they need to attain, before devising your assessment. Your assessment task should be designed according to the requirements in the standards and could be designed within your centre or as part of a consortium, drawing on the expertise of experienced colleagues. You should also draw on any assessment support material provided.

In some subjects, demonstrating a practical skill can show that candidates can apply the knowledge needed to demonstrate competence. In other subjects, knowledge may not be apparent from the performance. For example, in assessing Business Administration it may not be clear that candidates know when to use one system for storing information as opposed to another. In such cases, an additional assessment may be required to supplement any observation you may do of the skill.

Your choice of instrument of assessment will depend on a number of factors:

- ◆ it must be fit for purpose (eg where a practical skill needs to be demonstrated, you should choose a practical assessment)
- ◆ it has to allow candidates to produce enough evidence of the skills and knowledge specified in the qualification and ensure adequate coverage of all the outcomes
- ◆ it must generate evidence which can be measured against the standards specified in the qualification
- ◆ it should help all assessors of all candidates to make reliable assessment decisions where the same assessment task has been applied

Note: where a choice of assessment instruments is offered to candidates, you must take care to ensure that the options are of equal demand — otherwise a candidate's result could depend on which option was chosen.

An instrument of assessment should also be chosen to make best use of available resources. This is what is meant by choosing an instrument of assessment which is 'practicable'. For example, where an assessment is available from the National Assessment Bank, you should consider its use.

Where there is a possibility of more than one assessment instrument providing a valid assessment, eg deciding between using individual interviews or group discussions, you should consider choosing the instrument which is least disruptive, least demanding of staff or candidate time, and most cost-effective.

To sum up, staff in centres designing assessment tasks should follow these guidelines:

- ◆ Be clear who has overall responsibility for assessing a particular qualification within the centre (the internal moderator).
- ◆ Start devising assessment tasks early enough to allow time for the internal moderation process to take place.
- ◆ Check the Unit specification carefully to see what type of assessment instrument is expected or suggested, eg a case study, a practical assignment. The assessment instrument should be fit for purpose.
- ◆ Ensure that all Outcomes are covered (ie the assessment is valid) to the appropriate level of demand (as described by Performance Criteria).
- ◆ Where possible, combine the assessment of Outcomes by grouping related tasks to a particular problem solving situation or scenario (see the next sub-section ‘Integrated assessment’).
- ◆ Work together as a team which involves all those assessing the Unit. All candidates taking the Unit should be assessed by an internally-moderated assessment.

Integrated assessment

For any Outcome or Unit, it is not necessary to design an instrument of assessment to assess each Outcome or Performance Criterion separately — a more integrated approach to assessment can:

- ◆ take less time
- ◆ avoid over-assessment and improve motivation
- ◆ facilitate moderation
- ◆ give assurance of overall competence and improve validity
- ◆ benefit the teaching/learning process

For SVQs, candidate evidence must be cross-referenced back to the standards to show that all parts, including PCs and range, have been met.

For many National Qualifications, the level of integration can go a step further. As long as coverage of all Outcomes is built into assessment instruments and marking instructions, you do not need to look for evidence against individual PCs when you assess the candidate’s evidence. For example, you may be able to set a cut-off score at a level which gives confidence that, overall, a satisfactory level of competence has been attained.

3 The responses or solutions expected

In devising an assessment, it is important to think about what you will accept as evidence and how this will be marked or measured. Ideally, you should determine your assessment scheme (ie ‘marking instructions’) at the same time as you devise your assessment — this will ensure they complement each other. For example, for a practical skills test, you should consider devising an observation checklist defining the skills and activities you expect to see during assessment.

For a written test, you must produce an assessment scheme which covers all possible valid responses and how they will be marked. You should bear in mind that your notional pass score (or ‘cut-off score’) may need to be adjusted in the light of candidate evidence — sometimes a test can turn out to be easier or more demanding than you intended.

You must ensure that, when determining your responses or solutions, you anticipate all the acceptable responses to your questions. In other words, where you set an open question, make sure that your solution identifies all the acceptable responses from your candidates. For a short-answer question, there may only be one correct answer. Ensuring that your marking instructions match your questions in this way is an important reason why your assessment scheme should be tried out before being applied to all candidates.

It is good practice to avoid setting questions with two related parts where the correct answer in the second part depends on having the correct answer to the first. However, if this is unavoidable, for example in a subject like Mathematics, your assessment scheme should ensure that you do not apply a double penalty for a mistake in the initial part of the question. In other words, if the two parts of a question are related, the candidate may be required to carry forward an answer from the first part of the question and apply it to the second. If the first answer is wrong, assessors should not apply a double penalty where the candidate has been shown to carry out all the steps correctly in the second.

4 Vetting the assessment and associated assessment scheme

While the task of writing assessment specifications may have been delegated to one member of staff, it is important that others delivering the Unit have a chance to vet the assessments and assessment schemes before they are finalised. This will help to ensure that they are fit for purpose, valid and practicable. Where this vetting results in a change to part of the assessment, care must be taken to make a corresponding change in the assessment scheme.

The usual way of ensuring that assessments are appropriate to the task for which they have been designed is to consult with a more senior member of staff who has responsibility in that subject area. In schools, principal teachers will either check the quality of assessment personally or delegate this task to nominated staff in the department.

Note: even after an assessment has been applied, you may have to make further adjustments. For example, for process or practical skills assessment, you may, after assessing a few candidates and in discussion with colleagues, find that the observation checklist needs to be amended. For a written test, where a group of candidates are completing an assessment at the same time, you may have to make changes to the marking instructions to include further answers.

These changes can often be done informally, but it is essential to make sure any changes are agreed and communicated to all assessors.

5 Assessing candidate evidence

You should now have a valid and practicable assessment which you can use with your candidates. However, valid assessments can be used inappropriately, and you need to be aware of how the reliability of your assessors can have a bearing on the fair and consistent assessment of your candidates. Assessment decisions are reliable when:

- ◆ they are based on evidence produced by valid assessment instruments
- ◆ a range of assessors have reached consistently accurate decisions applying the assessment in different situations, in different contexts, and with different candidates
- ◆ they are consistent over time (eg irrespective of whether they were assessed/marked early in marking period or later)
- ◆ they are based on evidence produced under assessment conditions which have been applied consistently

Conditions for assessment

When applying an assessment, you should be aware that there are certain conditions which need to be created at the time in order for the assessment to be valid and reliable. There are many different types of assessment conditions, but what they all have in common is that they must be applied consistently and effectively to all candidates within centres if national standards are to be maintained. Arrangements documents and Unit specifications are frequently prescriptive on such conditions.

For example, in a written test, you should ensure that candidates are:

- ◆ given a quiet environment in which to complete the assessment
- ◆ subject to the same time restrictions for the test unless there are arrangements for special assessment requirements
- ◆ subject to invigilation to ensure silence and non-collaboration
- ◆ aware of when they are able to consult text books, dictionaries or use calculators

For assessments, such as projects, where candidates may be asked to complete practical assignments, case studies or portfolios, you should ensure they are aware of:

- ◆ how much they can confer amongst themselves
- ◆ the level of support you will offer them
- ◆ to what extent they are able to consult text books, dictionaries or use personal computers

Authentication

Where you do not have the opportunity to observe your candidates carrying out activities or producing evidence at first hand, you will need to take steps to confirm that your candidates' evidence was produced by them. This process is often referred to as 'authentication' and also helps to minimise the number of times candidates are involved in malpractice cases because they received assistance from other sources or plagiarised the work of other candidates or authors.

There are several ways of carrying out authentication. For projects for National Courses, you should follow the procedures stipulated in Arrangements documents.

Authentication can be achieved by one or more of these methods:

- ◆ questioning
- ◆ use of personal logs
- ◆ peer reports
- ◆ write-ups under supervised conditions
- ◆ electronic tools
- ◆ countersigning of work by candidates, and/or by teacher/assessor

Questioning

Questioning your candidates on the evidence they produce is a useful and efficient way of authenticating a candidate's work. Questions asking candidates to explain parts of the evidence and/or describe the process of producing it, should not only confirm that they are responsible for generating the evidence, but also help to show that they know and can apply the knowledge and understanding for the qualification.

Personal logs

Where candidates are producing assessment evidence over an extended period of time, you may ask them to maintain a diary or ‘log’ of planning, developing and reviewing activities undertaken in the course of the assessment. The log can be used to record success and problems, and to form the basis of questioning. This particular authentication device also serves a useful purpose in that it encourages candidates to plan and review their work.

Peer reports

Where your candidates have been involved in group work, reports by members of a group of peers on each other’s involvement in producing the evidence can help to explain individual involvement in the task. It would be wise, however, not to place too much reliance on this method if you are concerned about friendships or rivalries influencing these reports.

Write-ups under supervised conditions

This is one of the most effective authentication methods. As part of the assessment process for Project-based National Courses (PBNs), candidates producing case studies or investigations will have their materials assessed externally by SQA. However, centres will be required to ensure that some of this material is produced under supervised conditions in the classroom. The section on authentication under external assessment will provide more information on how to meet these conditions.

For National Courses, practical assignments will, however, be assessed internally in centres and be subject to rigorous external moderation. As some practical work will involve candidates in producing artefacts, such as designing and making electronic products in line with specifications, you should be able to observe your candidates at first hand. Such observations could also be supported by questioning to explain or describe ways of working on the evidence.

Visits to externally moderate such practical assignments will be available three times a year. You will be asked which of the three best suits your candidates. You should at least have completed assessment of the nominated sample of candidates before an external moderation visit takes place. The section on external moderation provides more information on the processes SQA will use to deploy external moderators and carry out visits to centres.

Electronic tools

There are a number of electronic tools you could use to help authenticate candidate evidence. Products designed to support virtual learning, sometimes known as ‘managed learning environments’ (MLE), can date-stamp work as candidates submit it, and complete candidate profiles. Candidates’ contributions to online conferences or e-mail discussions can also be recorded by such systems.

Some electronic tools are available which are designed specifically for the purpose of minimising or eliminating opportunities for impersonation. These include:

- ◆ password-controlled systems
- ◆ handwriting and keyboard use recognition
- ◆ computer scanning of:
 - facial features
 - the cornea/iris
 - voice prints
 - fingerprints
 - hand patterns

Electronic tools can help reassure you that the candidate is working on the computer at the other end of the connection, but they cannot guarantee that all of the work the candidate submits during the transaction has been produced without help from others. Software products are being

developed to identify plagiarism, for example by scanning candidates' work for blocks of text which have been downloaded from documents on the internet.

It is advisable to combine the use of electronic tools with tried and tested quality assurance approaches such as questioning candidates directly.

For more information, please refer to the SQA publication *Assessment and Quality Assurance for Open and Distance Learning* (A1030, February 2001). Copies are available from SQA's Customer Contact Centre — 0141-242 2214.

Countersigning by candidates, and/or by lecturer or assessor

Under the Arrangements for National Courses, candidates are required to declare in writing that the evidence they have produced is their own.

Countersigning of evidence is often used in SVQs, particularly as Units are signed off. It is normal practice to have candidates sign and date personal statements and for assessors to sign and date observations and questioning. Where a Unit has been signed off, the signatures of candidates and assessors should be included, along with the signature of the internal verifier/moderator if the material has been included in the sample for internal verification.

6 Checking the consistency of assessment decisions

How to avoid assessor bias

The reliability of assessment can be enhanced by being aware of how assessment decisions could be biased by factors which should have no bearing on the assessment process or your judgements. These factors may include your subconscious personal prejudices. For example, you may find females easier to teach or neater in their work and unconsciously assess their evidence more generously.

Another factor which may affect your judgement is described as the 'halo and horns' effect. The halo effect may emerge when you are familiar with your candidates and good performance in the past leads you to assume they are performing well at present. The opposite of this is the horns effect where no matter how well your candidates are performing, your judgements of poor performance in the past are continuing to influence your assessment decisions now.

Standardisation of assessment decisions is an important part of ensuring assessor reliability. The internal moderation process should ensure that staff carry out checks on the on-going application of standards. This will establish that part-way through assessing candidate evidence, the assessment decisions have not become too harsh or more lenient. Standardisation methods will depend on the nature of evidence. There are a number of techniques:

- ◆ For example, if the candidate evidence consists of scripts from written tests, you should divide up the evidence so that assessors assess the same section across all candidates. This allows each assessor a better chance to understand and apply associated assessment schemes. It also balances those assessors who might be a little hard or a little lenient in their assessment and helps to eliminate 'halo and horns' effects. You should pay particular attention to borderline decisions.
- ◆ If using coursework, folios, reports or case studies, you should consider setting up agreement trials based on the assessment scheme. In a small centre, this can be done informally by sharing samples of candidates' work, discussing it and reaching a consensus. In larger centres with many staff, this will require a more formal system of agreement under the direction of the internal moderator. By discussing discrepancies and coming to a shared understanding based on the assessment criteria, a common standard will be applied.
- ◆ For practical or process skills, you will also need a form of agreement trial, perhaps involving pairs of assessors. This model is most effective if an internal moderator assesses a sample of

candidates alongside the assessor. Both should initially make independent judgements, and then discuss discrepancies and reach consensus.

If your school is small, it may be necessary to work with a centre other than your own.

7 Recording your assessment decisions

Once you have carried out your assessments and have sufficient, relevant, and authentic evidence showing that your candidates have met the standards, you are in a position to make and record your final assessment decision. You may decide in reviewing the evidence, however, that there is some part of the evidence which requires re-assessment before you record your decision.

Re-assessment

Where candidates have been unsuccessful in demonstrating their attainment of skills and knowledge or competence, they can be re-assessed.

The Arrangements documents for National Qualifications stipulate the conditions in which re-assessment can be carried out. Our advice is that there should normally be one, or in exceptional circumstances two, re-assessment opportunities.

For a large part of the National Qualification family, the National Assessment Bank will provide appropriate re-assessment materials. Our advice about re-assessment opportunities will be reflected in all the National Assessment Bank packs published from the end of May 1999. Packs published before that date should be read in the context of the advice.

You will need to consider whether your candidates need to re-take the whole assessment or only part.

This will depend on:

- ◆ the assessment instrument that has been used
- ◆ the purpose of the assessment

For example, in demonstrating a practical skill or in completing a practical assignment, it may not be possible to re-assess only those parts of the performance in which the candidate failed to demonstrate competence. Otherwise you would fragment the assessment process and be unable to make a judgement about the candidate's performance in the Outcome or Unit as a whole.

In assessments which test knowledge and understanding and other cognitive skills, it would be bad practice to give candidates the same assessments repeatedly, and to ask them identical questions — they would be able to rehearse the expected answers without knowing why they were acceptable. In these situations, you will need to have alternative assessments available and ensure that other candidates have also not undertaken the assessment recently.

In all cases of re-assessment, the assessment must be of equal demand to the original assessment.

For written tests designed to identify the candidate's knowledge or understanding at a given point in time or as a single entity, it may also be necessary to re-assess the whole Unit since it may not be possible to extract some of the items for re-assessment.

Where it is possible to isolate an Outcome which has not been achieved, it should be possible to re-assess just that Outcome. Where parts of several Outcomes are involved, it would be more straightforward to present the candidate with a complete new assessment.

Where the evidence is generated over a period of time, such as in a long-term project, it may be possible to re-do parts of an assessment. It may, for instance, be feasible for the candidate to

resubmit the part of the project where there is a problem and for this then to be incorporated into the final submission.

However, where a project has been designed as an integrated assessment, the candidate may be required to undertake the whole assessment again to show ability to complete the project as a single complex task. In such cases, the candidate may have to work to a different project specification.

Re-assessment in specific qualifications

You should note that for qualifications where merit is awarded (eg GSVQ), candidates who fail the Unit and wish to resit can still achieve merit.

There are, however, certain conditions for such re-assessments (eg time), and you should follow the requirements stipulated in the assessment procedures for these qualifications.

8 Forwarding results to SQA, and maintaining assessment records

All qualifications which are assessed wholly or in part by internal assessment are subject to external moderation. As your candidates complete their qualifications, we will carry out external moderation in the form of visits to your centre or by asking you to send in material to SQA.

Internal moderation processes should ensure that the candidate evidence, assessment materials and records are maintained and/or dispatched to SQA in line with external moderation requirements for the qualifications being offered.

Once your centre has been advised of our arrangements for external moderation, the SQA publication *Operational Guide for Centres: schools 2002/2003* (FA1599/2, August 2003) explains how you should inform us of your candidate achievements and the forms you should use to forward your candidates' results. Copies are available from SQA's Customer Contact Centre — 0141-242 2214.

6 Internal assessment and external moderation

The information in this section remains unchanged from the previous edition. The section will be amended when SQA undertakes a more substantial revision of this publication, the date of which is still to be decided. In the mean time, you can find the quality criteria for external moderation in our publication *Quality Assurance Principles, Elements and Criteria* (A0798, December 1998).

Introduction

Whereas internal moderation is carried out by centre staff, external moderation is carried out by moderators appointed by SQA.

SQA moderators are experienced practitioners in education and training. We train them and monitor their work to ensure that they consistently apply national standards of assessment, as it is important that both centres and moderators make assessment decisions accurately and consistently. Moderators always begin from the premise that centres have made assessment decisions correctly, and that the purpose of the moderation exercise is to confirm the centres' decisions. They assume that all candidates entered for the same qualification are assessed to a common standard — ie that internal moderation is operating effectively.

External moderation focuses on the **validity** of the assessment instruments, how they are applied, and the **reliability** of the centres' assessment decisions.

At the end of this section there is a summary of the moderation process, and a flowchart showing the steps which centres take when preparing for moderation of National and Higher National Qualifications.

Types of moderation

The nature of the evidence generated will determine the form of moderation which is used.

Visiting moderation will continue to play a significant role. It will be used where the candidate evidence is ephemeral (such as a performance) or bulky.

We will use central moderation at certain times in the year where the volume of work justifies it.

At other times we will use postal moderation — which means evidence being sent out from our offices to the moderator at home. Schools have considerable experience in responding to all three types of moderation.

For the immediate future, we will continue to moderate all the qualifications previously offered by SCOTVEC by visiting. However, we do anticipate that many will lend themselves to central moderation in the future. We will continue to use visiting moderation to give centres with little experience of central moderation time to become familiar with the administrative procedures. A fundamental change is that we will carry out moderation on **completed** candidate evidence.

It is our aim to develop and adopt a coherent approach to all internally-assessed qualifications.

How central moderation works

In central moderation, centres prepare all the materials required for scrutiny. This should not be an onerous task, and we will do everything we can to ensure that your workload is kept to a minimum.

We will notify you of the candidates whose work is to be submitted, and will provide all the required stationery, such as envelopes. We will ask you to ensure that the specified candidates' work is enclosed in the envelope provided and is either available at a pick-up point for collection, or is posted using pre-paid, pre-addressed labels which, again, we will provide. Work within the centre should not be greatly disrupted.

We recognise that, when central moderation is employed where previously visiting was used, centres may be concerned about a possible loss of the developmental benefits gained through visits. We are addressing this by ensuring that full and comprehensive feedback will be provided to centres.

Prior moderation

We strongly encourage centres to seek prior moderation of the assessment instrument and associated assessment scheme they intend to use where these are not:

- ◆ NAB materials
- ◆ an SQA approved assessment instrument and associated assessment scheme
- ◆ an assessment instrument and associated assessment scheme which has been successfully moderated

The use of prior moderation can prevent problems arising at a later date.

Selection of centres for moderation

Our aim is to operate a system of moderation that targets its resources where they are likely to be most effective. We will select centres for moderation in accordance with the following criteria, which will apply to all centres and will ensure fairness and consistency in approach. We will sample centres for moderation, for a particular Unit, if:

- ◆ the centre is offering the Unit for the first time
- ◆ the centre did not offer the Unit in the previous two years
- ◆ assessments were not accepted on the last occasion the centre was moderated
- ◆ the centre has not been selected for a specified period of time
- ◆ (for National Units) the centre showed poor agreement in the previous year between the internal assessments and the external assessments in National Courses
- ◆ concerns were expressed by moderators
- ◆ the centre requested moderation and this was agreed by SQA
- ◆ the centre is selected at random — the proportion of centres selected at random will be low where the national acceptance rates for the Unit over a period of time are high, and vice-versa

In the first few years of Higher Still it will not be possible to adhere to these criteria strictly. Due to the volumes involved, we will implement the criteria on a phased basis.

In the main, we will select centres according to their track record (ie moderation history) and current candidate entry information. If a centre has a good track record in a subject area, the likelihood is that we will not select it for moderation for some time. In this case, SQA has no reason to question the centre's ability to assess so there is no need to select it. We may however select a centre at random, regardless of its history. This is necessary to ensure that the system is rigorous. No centre can predict with certainty whether or not it will be selected.

In the main moderation will take place on a Unit-by-Unit basis. This will avoid any confusion, as we will notify centres of the Units selected for moderation. Centres will be able to concentrate on the preparation of materials for submission to the moderator for these selected Units only.

External moderation of National Courses

In certain National Courses, where the Course assessment involves internal assessment with external moderation, we will moderate all centres annually — candidates will be sampled, as detailed below in the section ‘Candidate sampling’.

Entry information

The process of selecting centres for moderation will be triggered when we receive entries from centres. We need to know who is doing what, where, and when. When we receive an entry, our computerised system will automatically select centres for moderation in accordance with the established criteria.

For each entry, we will need candidate details, Unit/Course/Group Award details, and a completion date (detailing the month and year, ie mm/yyyy). In some instances it might be difficult to provide completion information, but this should be only in a minority of cases. We will operate a flexible system, which can accept amendments to completion dates.

We strongly encourage you to submit entries as early as possible. This will help us to moderate effectively, carrying out the necessary processes and procedures systematically over a period of time rather than within a restricted timescale. If data is submitted at an early stage, we will be in a stronger position to guarantee an enhanced service to centres, and the early issue of moderation information. We do recognise, though, that in some situations it may not be possible to provide entry information at an early stage.

To ensure that there is enough time to carry out the necessary procedures, we will require centres to submit entry information no later than 10 weeks prior to the expected completion date. (This is in line with the requirement laid down at UK level for SVQ/NVQs.) We are confident that if only a small number of ‘late entries’ are received, we can continue to deliver a good service to our stakeholders. However, if numbers are large, there will be logistical challenges, and we hope that our centres will recognise this and make every effort to provide the entry information as soon as possible.

Centre selection

Once we have received entries, we may select a centre for moderation in, for example, one Unit in a subject area.

After a successful moderation it is unlikely that we will select that centre for a Unit in the same subject area for some time — the successful moderation result will be used to inform future selections.

If, however, problems are identified at moderation, we will automatically select the centre for the same Unit on the next occurrence — the unsuccessful moderation result being used to inform future selections. We have designed this procedure to help us target our resources effectively.

Candidate sampling

The sample of work for moderation should, ideally, comprise the work of 12 candidates. This number is large enough for us to be sure of the reliability of your assessment. For centres with less than 12 candidates, the entire group of candidates’ work will be scrutinised. Where a centre has more than 12 candidates entered for a Unit, we will select the candidates who will be sampled, and will tell you. There are two benefits to this approach: first, it will ensure rigour, as the awarding body will carry out the selection using a random selection method; second, from the centre’s point of view the procedure is administratively simple.

Timing of moderation

Centres are asked to submit completion dates to coincide with the arranged event dates. Only where it is necessary for moderation to take place outwith these dates should you submit alternative dates. For example, where a central moderation event is scheduled for December and you know that you will have both candidate results and evidence available by 30 November, then you should submit a completion date of November (11/2003). If you complete the Units and have the material available prior to November (the last available date for inclusion in the December event) and there is no necessity for immediate moderation, you are still asked to use the November completion date.

We will use this approach for both central and certain types of visiting moderation.

Arrangements for visiting moderation

Where we use visiting moderation because the evidence generated is ephemeral, eg a performance, it will be necessary to moderate prior to completion, in order to ensure that the candidates are available.

However, we will continue to moderate many qualifications by visiting even though they do not adhere to the rule that it is the nature of the evidence generated which will determine the type of moderation to be used. In these cases, where the evidence is largely paper based, we will carry out visiting moderation, like central moderation, after the completion date. In time, though, we expect that the majority of qualifications in these areas will lend themselves to central moderation. We will be using visiting moderation in these cases as an interim measure while centres become familiar with central moderation.

Completion dates

For Units where visiting moderation will take place after completion, ie mainly National Certificate modules these are the moderation event timings:

Visiting event to take place in	Associated completion date	mm/yyyy
December	November	11/2003
March	February	02/2004
June	May	05/2004

Details of earlier completions should not be submitted unless early moderation is necessary.

Note: the completion date to be submitted will be the month preceding moderation (event).

Retrospective moderation

We may select any Units with completion dates after May, ie June or July, for retrospective moderation. We will notify centres of selection prior to the submitted completion month, and require you to retain selected candidates' evidence for the moderation event, which will take place in September.

If, as a result of retrospective moderation, we identify problems with your assessment of a Unit, we will automatically select your centre for moderation on the next occurrence of the Unit. Where the problem lies with an assessment instrument, you will be required to seek prior moderation of the assessment instrument before the next offering of the Unit. This will not apply where NAB materials have been used.

Retrospective moderation will not affect candidates already certificated, but it will ensure that any required remediation takes place before any further certification occurs.

Ephemeral candidate evidence

In cases where we are looking at a centre's ability to assess ephemeral evidence (eg Drama performance), visiting moderation will take place prior to the completion of the Unit to ensure candidates are available at the centre to perform.

The completion month you have submitted will be the month in which moderation will take place. It should be noted however that for Units which are components of a Course, a completion date of no later than April must be submitted to meet the timescales for the conclusion of any moderation prior to summer certification. For stand-alone Units a completion date of May is advised.

Specific arrangements may be required in certain subject areas, eg National Qualifications in Physical Education, where visiting moderation may take place during a designated period. We will issue further information about these cases in due course.

Arrangements for central/postal moderation

Central moderation, where candidate evidence is collated and sent in to SQA for scrutiny, will in the future be the main method of moderation we use. We will use it for the majority of National Units, and will continue to use it in Standard Grades. Materials will be mostly paper-based, but could also include audio and video tapes or other easily-transported media.

Central moderation has the advantage that moderators work under the supervision of the Senior Moderator, who ensures that they apply the national standards consistently to each centre. It is also a more economical method, as moderators are expected to work through the candidate evidence from several centres in a day. It should also be administratively simpler and less demanding on your time than visiting moderation. Indeed, the centres which had experience of central moderation commented in their responses to the consultation exercise that it was less disruptive, was less threatening to staff in centres and promoted consistency.

We will provide comprehensive feedback to your centre where significant variations in your interpretation of the standards are revealed. Where necessary, a visit by a moderator will be arranged, at no cost to the centre.

Completion dates

The expected pattern of National Unit and National Course delivery, and the analysis of current finishing trends, indicate a need for two central moderation events, with the first taking place in December. This will cater for school Christmas-leavers and those centres and candidates who have completed Units by that time. We will use the month of December to arrange, administer, and carry out central moderation, inviting moderators to our offices in Dalkeith to scrutinise the candidates' work and centres' assessments. Candidate work should be completed and results available in the preceding month, so you should submit a November completion date (ie 11/2003).

The timing of the second event is crucial, as it has to cover completed Units and Courses which require moderation prior to summer certification. The event will take place in April. A major peak of activity is anticipated during this period. The timing of any central event must ensure that we have sufficient time to meet moderation requirements, process both candidate and centres' moderation results, and allow sufficient time for centres to carry out any re-assessments.

Units as components of a Course

In an effort to overcome this anticipated activity peak, there will be a central moderation event in April. Where Units are taken as part of a Course, you are required to submit at least one Unit entry with a completion date of no later than March. This will allow us to meet the timescales for the conclusion of any moderation prior to summer certification.

We recognise that by using the one Unit ‘up front’ option, this first Unit is the one most likely to be selected and that centres can therefore select/predict which Unit will be moderated, leading to worries about a lack of randomness and rigour. This is the reason why we have introduced an element of retrospective moderation (see previous page).

Stand-alone Units

Wherever possible, please submit completion dates of December and March for Units taken on a stand-alone basis (ie not entered along with or as part of a Course). However, for stand-alone Units where completion takes place during March and April (last completion date being May), we will endeavour to ensure moderation is concluded prior to summer certification.

Any Units completed in May, June and July may be subject to retrospective moderation.

The principles and procedures of retrospective moderation will also apply to centrally-moderated Units, both components of a Course and stand-alone.

Postal moderation

We will use postal moderation for two main reasons — first if the qualification is in an area of low uptake which could not justify the organisation of a central event, and second, where a centre requests moderation outwith the timing of an organised central event. This may be because a centre wishes to offer a Unit on more than one occasion in a year and wants the moderation result and feedback to inform any subsequent delivery of that Unit.

Postal moderation supplements central moderation and provides the flexibility required both by centres and SQA.

National Course assessments

For those National Courses where part of the Course assessment is subject to external central moderation, the date for the submission of Course or project work is generally 31 March.

Central/postal moderation dates

Event date	Completion date
December	November
April — for initial Unit, if component of a Course	March
Stand-alone Units	Will often fall into established central moderation dates, ie November and March. A completion date of May is advised to meet timescales for summer certification
Retrospective central moderation — September	April, May, June and July
National Course assessments (phase 1 only) April	March

Note: the completion date to be submitted will be the month preceding moderation (ie the moderation event).

Retention of evidence

We will advise centres selected for moderation to retain all candidate evidence for the appropriate Unit until at least three weeks after we have made a moderation decision. This will ensure that you hold the appropriate evidence should you wish to appeal against any (moderation) decision we have taken. For Units with completion dates of later than March, we will advise centres to retain evidence until after the selection of Units for retrospective moderation has taken place.

We will ensure that we return all evidence submitted for central/postal moderation to you as soon as possible after moderation (including materials submitted for Standard Grade). Where moderation has been unsuccessful, candidate evidence will be returned to centres as a matter of urgency, along with notification of this result and the appropriate feedback. This will ensure that both centres and SQA make full use of the limited timescales available for re-assessment and the resultant data processing, to meet certification dates. If not selected for moderation, centres will be advised to retain candidate evidence until at least three weeks after the completion date, as we may call upon the evidence at any stage in the awarding process.

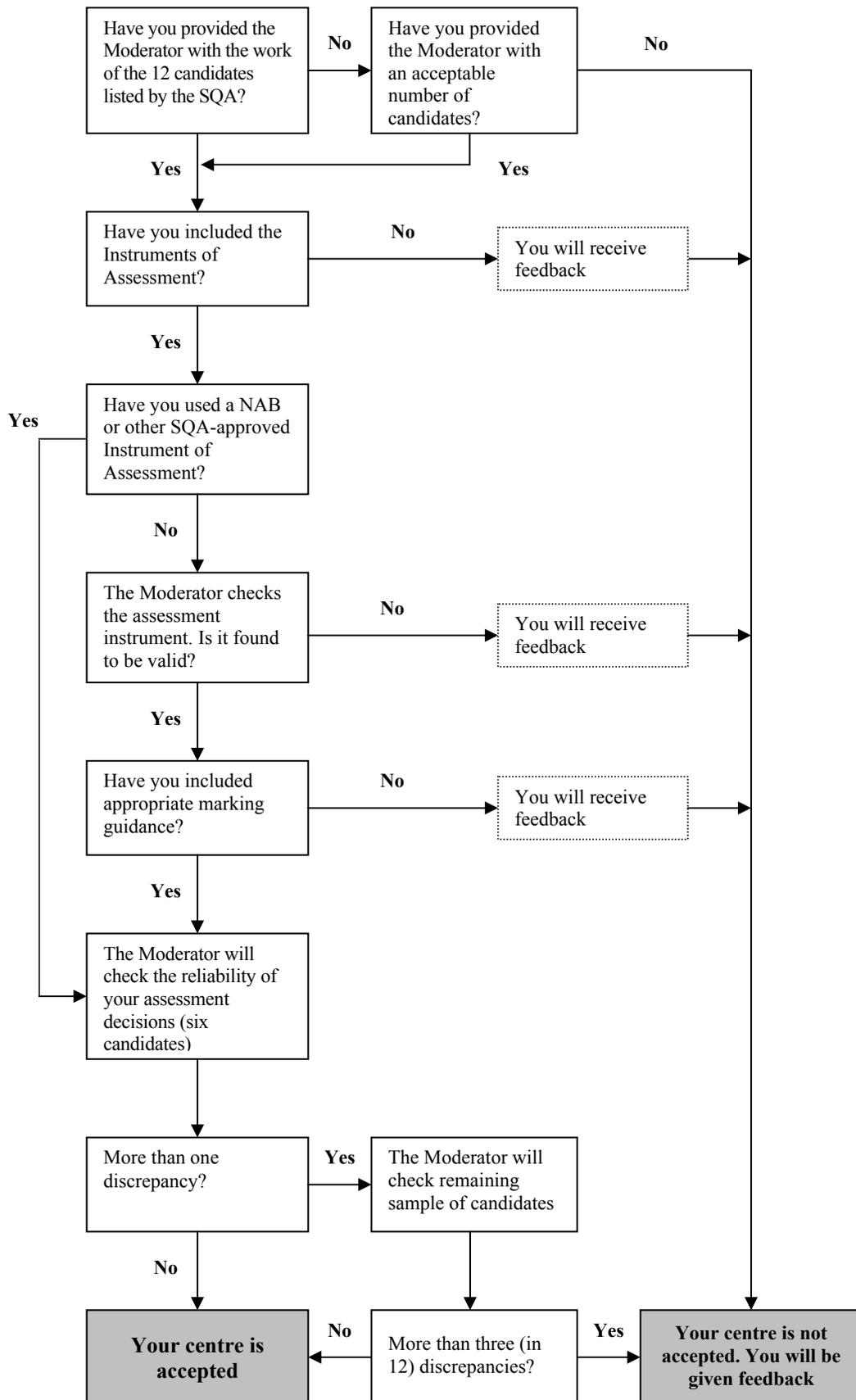
Where Units are components of a Course, evidence should be retained for possible use in support of an absentee or appeal submission relating to the external assessment of the Course.

Summary of the moderation process

These are the steps in the moderation process:

- ◆ Submit entries with appropriate completion date.
- ◆ Based on the entry data we receive, we will select centres for moderation and identify candidates whose work is to be sampled.
- ◆ If you are chosen for moderation, you will receive notification from us four to five weeks before the moderation event. If you do not hear from us by this time, you can assume that your centre has not been chosen and you can dispose of the evidence after the relevant appeals deadline (see 'Retention of evidence' above).
- ◆ Compile assessment evidence including details of candidates' achievement, candidates' evidence, assessment instrument, and marking instructions. For visiting moderation events, arrange for candidates to be present at the event. For central moderation, we will uplift your material.
- ◆ We carry out moderation to confirm your assessment decisions.
- ◆ We provide you with the outcome of moderation, and feedback from the moderator.
- ◆ We return material submitted for central moderation — you can dispose of this after the appeals deadline.

Step-by-step guide to external moderation



7 External assessment

Introduction

Some SQA qualifications are assessed partly or completely by external assessment. This section explains:

- ◆ stages in external assessment and how they contribute to quality assurance
- ◆ the assessment instruments generally used for external assessment

External assessment is the process used where the responsibility for judging candidate work and reaching decisions on candidate attainment rests with the awarding body rather than the centre. The principles underpinning external assessment are the same as those for internal assessment — external assessment must be *valid, reliable* and *practicable*.

The stages in external assessment are similar to those of internal assessment, except that the quality control procedures within each stage are carried out by the awarding body rather than the centre. This means that we are responsible for:

- ◆ producing assessment instruments and detailed assessment schemes
- ◆ establishing conditions under which assessments take place
- ◆ taking centre judgements into account
- ◆ assessing candidate evidence

Each type of assessment instrument currently used for internal assessment of SQA qualifications could conceivably be used for external assessment. The assessment instruments most commonly used are:

- ◆ written examinations or tests (question papers)
- ◆ projects or coursework (including investigations, assignments, dissertations and case studies)
- ◆ oral assessments or tests
- ◆ observation of performance or skill demonstrations

Entering candidates for qualifications

Some SQA qualifications are in hierarchies, and you will first have to be sure about the level at which each candidate should be entered. As soon as you have made these decisions, you should finalise your entry details with us. For example, some candidates working towards a National Course could achieve the Course Units at Higher level, but enter and achieve the external Course assessment at Intermediate 2 level. We need to know the entry details as soon as possible after the candidates begin the Course so we can plan print-runs of question papers and arrange for enough markers and examiners.

Producing assessment instruments and assessment schemes

Each Course or activity which is to be externally assessed requires an assessment instrument (or instruments) and for each assessment instrument there has to be an assessment scheme, or set of marking instructions, to ensure that all assessors are using the same approach to arrive at the final

Please note that all references in this section regarding recruitment of appointees are under review. Further information is available from the SQA's Customer Contact Centre on 0141-242 2214 or e-mail: customer@sqa.org.uk.

A new version of this guide will be available in due course.

assessment decision. As the awarding body, SQA is responsible for developing these, and we are also responsible for ensuring that they are developed on the basis of clear public specifications, and that they are checked and processed to a high standard.

Instruments are designed on the basis of the general assessment requirements for each qualification. Although our procedures for creating the specific assessment materials for external assessment are slightly different depending on the type of assessment instrument to be used, the quality control process is similar in each case.

Written examinations or tests (question papers)

Written question papers are produced by subject specialists or practitioners, on the basis of the agreed public specifications for the subject area. The subject specialists, known as *setters*, are nominated by the Assessment Panel for the subject and appointed by SQA. For National Qualification papers the setters are generally teachers or lecturers. Each year they work in teams with the Principal Assessor for the subject area and, following clear guidelines, create question papers that sample the syllabus for each subject in a way that is systematic yet unpredictable. Setters are then asked to vet or ‘shred’ each others’ draft question papers, and amend papers accordingly, and to devise assessment or marking schemes for the papers they have created.

All question papers and marking schemes for external assessment are then formally ‘vetted’ by a sub-group of the Assessment Panel for the subject. *Vetters* on the panel are likely to be practicing teachers and experienced setters. After vetting, the question papers are proof-read and an initial print copy is made. This is passed to an *external scrutineer*. The external scrutineer, who could be a former marker or examiner for the subject area, works through the paper as a candidate would and makes another check for errors in the questions or supporting information. Once this final quality check is complete the question papers are processed and published.

Question papers that are designed on an objective format, such as multiple-choice papers, are pre-tested before they are used with candidates. This means we can be sure that papers are at an appropriate level of demand, both in content and in terms of the technical specification of the paper.

The question paper setters and moderators may also be asked to create specimen question papers and National Assessment Bank items to exemplify the standards required to attain the qualification. Specimen question papers provide clear pictures of the depth required in terms of the treatment of the various subject areas, and allow you and your candidates to familiarise yourselves with the style and scale of assessment tasks.

Projects or coursework (including investigations, assignments, dissertations and case studies)

Assessment materials for project-based work or coursework are devised in a similar way, using an agreed process of quality control. The Arrangements documents for the qualification define the subject content to be assessed and the general assessment approach required. Subject specialists are appointed by the Assessment Panel to adapt general project-type specifications to create specific assessment instruments for the qualification. This ensures that a common approach is adopted for project-based assessment in terms of format and the levels of attainment expected of candidates. The subject specialists are also asked to work with general criteria for project-based marking and grading, and to provide guidance for assessors on how these criteria could be contextualised to the subject area or qualification in question.

This work is generally approached on a team basis, or subject specialists may work individually and then vet each others’ work for quality assurance purposes. The project/coursework specifications and assessment guidance are then approved by the Principal Assessor and SQA Qualifications Manager for the subject area, under the direction of the Assessment Panel.

With project-based assessment or coursework, in some circumstances, it may be possible to apply external assessment where the assessment instruments and criteria have been created by centres and approved by SQA. For example, your centre could develop an assessment specification for a case study which we approve before it is used with candidates. The Arrangements documents for the qualifications will clarify our approval role if this is required.

It may also be possible for project specifications we have created to be tailored to centres' needs, to meet available resources, local opportunities, and the specific interests of candidates. A generic specification for practical assignments in an Engineering subject, for example, might ask candidates to plan, create and evaluate a product. The specification could be adapted to encourage candidates to produce products that meet the requirements of local firms. You could decide that candidates should consult these firms at the planning stage and present the finished products to them for evaluation.

Provided the assessment materials are produced according to SQA-agreed quality control procedures, and the candidates' evidence or performance is assessed by SQA representatives at the end of the process, this is still external assessment.

Oral assessments/tests and observation of performance/skill demonstrations

External assessment using oral assessment, or assessment via observation and questioning, is carried out by SQA visiting assessors and visiting examiners, who operate in accordance with clearly-defined and published assessment criteria. Standard checklists or marking instructions for each qualification are used by all of the assessors for the qualification. This approach is designed to promote consistent assessment decisions across assessors, and centres, irrespective of time or place.

The precise, unambiguous assessment criteria and marking documents needed for this approach to assessment are devised using the same general quality control process used for the production of question papers and project specifications. Groups of subject specialists are appointed by the Assessment Panel to adapt general assessment specifications to create a set of detailed assessment criteria for the qualification. The groups work closely with the Principal Assessor and the SQA Qualifications Manager for the subject area. The Principal Assessor then trains the team of visiting assessors and monitors their assessment decisions to ensure everyone is assessing to the same standards.

Establishing conditions under which assessments take place

For all types of assessment activity, internal and external, we have to identify and publish the conditions under which the assessment should take place. This is because candidates' performances in specific tasks are affected by factors such as the environment within which they carry out the activity; the level of support they are provided with; and the length of time, and the information and resources they are allowed for the assessment. Another reason for establishing conditions for assessment is to check on the authenticity of candidate evidence. In order to control and standardise the factors that can affect candidate performance, the procedures used for authenticating candidate evidence should be known. In this way we ensure that assessment is fair and consistent, and that assessment instruments are reliably applied for all candidates and in all centres.

The Arrangements documents, which we publish for each qualification, outline the conditions under which the assessment must take place. For externally-assessed qualifications these conditions are always defined by SQA, though they may sometimes have to be adapted slightly to make assessments practicable for certain centres and possible for candidates with special

assessment requirements. The conditions for assessment will vary according to the type of assessment instrument to be used and the degree of flexibility required.

A malpractice case could result in a candidate's award being cancelled. If this happens with one of your candidates and you disagree with our decision, you can appeal on the candidate's behalf.

The SQA publication *The Appeals Process* (A0690/3, June 2002 — currently being revised) tells you how to go about making an appeal. See also section D of this document 'Appeals Policy and Process'.

If the conditions for assessment for a particular assessment activity are not followed it is considered to be a breach of regulations that could lead to claims of *malpractice*. Malpractice cases arise where there are:

- ◆ Breaches of regulations in relation to examination-room conditions: candidates would be judged to be in breach of regulations if they did not adhere to the rules for behaviour while the examination is in progress. For example, they must not communicate with each other or use unauthorised aids, such as notes, during the course of the examination. SQA-appointed invigilators supervise the examination process and any cases of malpractice are reported to SQA by the invigilator. Only a small number of these cases arise each year.
- ◆ Breaches of regulations relating to authentication of candidate work. Candidates would be judged to be in breach of regulations, for example, when producing evidence for coursework or project work, where they benefit from an unacceptable level of support from others (eg parents, personal tutors or other candidates). Another reason for malpractice under this category would be plagiarism. This occurs where candidates use material from books, the internet or other sources and claim it as their own work, or when they present other peoples' ideas as their own. This could happen in the context of written or oral examinations as well as with project-type work.

Some of these cases of malpractice are the result of candidates not clearly understanding the difference between acceptable and illegitimate support or use of material. It is important that you clarify this with candidates and stress to them that we will be seeking assurance that the evidence you submit on their behalf is their own work.

Written examinations or tests — conditions

Assessment by written question paper requires clearly-defined conditions for assessment which must be strictly applied to ensure fairness and reliability of assessment. Written examination papers are generally 'confidential'. This is necessary because examinations sample the knowledge-base and contexts of the Course or programme. It is important that the areas to be sampled remain unknown to candidates to ensure full coverage of the Course in terms of learning and preparation for the examination. The confidentiality means that, irrespective of the areas of coursework sampled, SQA and the public can be confident that assessment decisions are independent of the sample, stable, and reliable.

Information on conditions for assessment in the Arrangements documents could outline instructions or regulations relating to:

- ◆ duration of the assessment activity
- ◆ layout of the examination room
- ◆ 'open-book' or 'closed-book' assessment activity
- ◆ resources candidates are allowed to take into the room with them (eg dictionaries, calculators)
- ◆ software candidates may use if computers are available, and information on IT functions they may not be allowed to use (eg spell-check or grammar-check functions)
- ◆ communication during the assessment activity

Examinations are conducted under the supervision of invigilators, who are appointed by us and who ensure that the conditions for assessment are consistently applied. Your centre will be asked to nominate potential SQA invigilators. For more on the role of the invigilator, see the section 'Assessing candidates' evidence' (page 42).

Our publication *Handbook for Invigilators 2003* (A1747, March 2003) explains an invigilator's role and duties.

Project-type assessments

For project assessment the Arrangements documents should provide similar information in terms of the conditions and regulations relating to the nature of project-based evidence, word counts for specific items of evidence, appropriate degrees of tutor/teacher support during the development of the project and the authentication procedures required to ensure that project evidence produced is the candidate's own work.

Authentication of project work

In external assessment where assessment evidence is generated in centres and sent to SQA, the responsibility for authenticating candidates' work rests with tutors/teachers or internal assessors. The individual responsible must be able to say with confidence that work produced is the work of the candidate in question.

Project-type assessment in particular raises concerns about the authenticity of candidates' work. This is because projects often involve unsupervised investigative work carried out during the candidate's own time. Project-based assessments must generate reliable assessment decisions to enjoy parity of esteem with invigilated examinations in qualifications at the same level.

To ensure the authenticity of candidate's work the conditions for assessment for project assessments could include some or all of the following requirements:

- ◆ Candidates carry out as much of the project work as possible within the centre, in a supervised environment.
- ◆ Candidates use log books (or equivalent) to plan work and record their progress.
- ◆ Teachers/tutors or internal assessors question candidates on the nature of their work as it progresses.
- ◆ Candidates produce a proportion of their written work, or final drafts of their work, within the centre, either in an informal supervised environment or under examination room conditions with centre invigilation.
- ◆ Where candidates are working on group projects, they are allowed to collaborate on aspects of their work, but they must retain evidence of their own contributions to the project.
- ◆ Candidates sign their work off as their own and teachers/tutors or internal assessors sign a declaration stating that, to the best of their knowledge, candidate work submitted to SQA for external assessment is the work of the candidate in question.

In any one situation, a selection of these authenticating devices should be used. The assessment part of the relevant Arrangements document provides you with information on the approaches to be used for that particular qualification. We have also produced the publication *Assessment and Quality Assurance for Open and Distance Learning* (A1030, February 2001) which contains a section on authentication which you may find useful. Copies are available from SQA's Customer Contact Centre — 0141-242 2214.

Oral assessments and assessments carried out through observation of performance

Conditions for assessment for oral examinations and assessments carried out through observation of a performance or skill-demonstration are also specified in the Arrangements documents for each assessment. For observation of a performance, for example, these could outline the duration of the activity, the resources and equipment candidates are allowed to use, and the nature of communication allowed between candidates, if any. The Arrangements documents for this type of assessment activity will also provide instructions on the format of any candidate evidence to be sent to SQA, specifying, for example, that taped evidence for an oral assessment is mandatory or video evidence for a demonstration or performance is acceptable.

Taking centres' judgements into account

For most externally-assessed qualifications, we ask centres to use evidence from internally-assessed work to estimate candidates' likely achievement in the externally-assessed components of the qualifications. This is to allow us to make external assessment judgements in the light of your judgements on internal assessment. We have been using centres' estimates for some time — they are used currently for arriving at final assessment decisions for Standard Grade and for all National Courses.

Where a centre is accurate in estimating its candidates' achievement in a subject at a specific level, individual candidates from that centre who do not do as well as expected in the external assessment can, potentially, be awarded the qualification at their estimated grade. We use this system to enhance the reliability of final assessment decisions, and it also allows us to award qualifications to candidates who, for some acceptable reason, are absent on the day of the external assessment.

There are three further uses of estimates, which add to the overall reliability of assessment decisions:

- ◆ We collate the estimates and use them, along with information from other sources, to see what percentage of candidates teachers and lecturers in Scotland thought would attain particular grades in that session. This helps us set appropriate pass marks and cut-off scores for the assessments.
- ◆ We use estimates to decide whether candidate evidence needs to be re-marked. Each marker's work is checked and a decision is made as to whether the marker has been consistently accurate, lenient or severe, or whether the marking has ranged across these categories and has therefore been inconsistent. The top priority for a re-mark would be a candidate whose work had been marked by a relatively severe marker, and awarded marks at just below a borderline or cut-off level, where the centre estimate suggested that the candidate should be awarded a better grade.
- ◆ We can target our external moderation resources towards centres where estimates are less accurate.

There is more on re-marking in the next sub-section, 'Assessing candidates' evidence'.

You will be asked to provide us with Course estimates for Standard Grades and National Courses. The sources of evidence which you could use for estimates include:

- ◆ **National Assessment Bank items** — where they are available, NABs should provide an important source of evidence for estimates, particularly when several are combined. You should, however, check that the NAB items you use are designed to allow adequate 'headroom' for candidates to demonstrate potential attainment at grades B and A as well as attainment at grade C. If they do not allow 'headroom', national support material should be available.
- ◆ **Written examinations** — ideally these would be tasks which are as similar to operational examinations as possible, such as preliminary examinations ('prelims') or tests organised by your centre. Some National Assessment Bank instruments (NABs) can be combined to form written tests.
- ◆ **Projects/coursework** — you could use evidence that arises from the earlier stages of the Course or project, such as evidence used for internal assessment of Units.
- ◆ **Oral assessments or performance/skill-demonstrations** — you may be able to use coursework that allows candidates opportunities to practise the skills needed for this type of external assessment.

The assessment instruments on which you base your estimates should be as similar as possible to those used in the external assessment. The publication *Estimates and Assessment Appeals: Guidance on generating evidence* (A0992/2, February 2001) provides general and subject specific advice on estimates.

Assessing candidates' evidence

At the stage in the process where candidates produce external assessment evidence, and this evidence is assessed, your areas of responsibility and ours fall into two distinct categories. These are:

- ◆ The centre's role: managing the assessment process.
- ◆ SQA's role: arriving at assessment decisions.

Your role: managing the assessment process

Where qualifications are externally assessed, centres are responsible for managing the arrangements leading up to external assessment. The activities involved in meeting this responsibility vary according to the form of external assessment to be used.

Preparing candidates for assessment

All candidates must be given full information about the nature of the assessment they are about to undertake, including an explanation of the regulations associated with the assessment instrument to be used. For examinations, for example, they would have to be told about whether they are permitted to access resources, such as dictionaries and calculators, during the examination process. For project-based work they may need to be told about aspects of the project evidence that have to be written up in supervised time, and the arrangements for doing this.

Candidates with special assessment requirements

Some candidates will have special assessment requirements and it is the centre's responsibility to ensure that requests for special arrangements are met. This could involve, for example, your centre having to find readers or scribes for candidates. You may also have to set up separate rooms with particular facilities and equipment, such as word-processing facilities. Further information on special assessment requirements can be found in the 'Special assessment and certification arrangements' section (page 48).

Managing external written examinations or tests (question papers)

For written examinations, you are responsible for:

- ◆ providing sufficient, appropriate accommodation and equipment
- ◆ preparing examination rooms to ensure that conditions for assessment are maintained
- ◆ ensuring secure storage of examination stationery
- ◆ nominating suitable, potential SQA invigilators
- ◆ liaising with invigilators before and during the examination programme, to ensure the smooth operation of the process

SQA Invigilators

We appoint invigilators and provide them with a detailed handbook on the invigilation role and the responsibilities of the post. Invigilators play a very important role in the quality control of the assessment process. They are responsible for:

- ◆ receipt and security of examination papers (Chief Invigilator)
- ◆ distribution of examination papers

- ◆ overseeing examinations to ensure that examination regulations are not breached
- ◆ reporting back to SQA, especially where incidents of malpractice occur
- ◆ collecting candidate papers and dispatching these to SQA

Managing oral assessments or tests, or observation of performance or skill demonstrations

Your responsibilities in relation to preparing for oral assessments or tests, or assessments carried out through the observation of performance or skill demonstrations, relate mostly to arranging for the accommodation and resources needed for the assessment to take place. You are required to provide candidates with the guidance and information they need to prepare them for assessment by the SQA visiting assessors, and you are also required to co-operate with the assessors in advance, during and after the assessment activities.

Managing projects or coursework

Most project-based assessment evidence that is subject to external assessment is sent to us, either for distribution to individual markers or for central marking. This means that you are responsible for organising the production of candidates' project evidence and for submitting this to us within the required time.

For externally-assessed projects or coursework, it is your responsibility to provide appropriate, on-going guidance and support to candidates while the project work or coursework is developing. You should ensure that all candidates are supported in developing the general skills needed for project work, and that individual candidates are equipped with the specific skills and knowledge they may need for their own projects. Candidates should be encouraged to seek feedback from their teacher/tutor on the quality of their work.

You also have an important role to play in authenticating items of evidence. In project-based assessment, this could mean your centre has to arrange and supervise the writing-up of components of candidates' evidence.

You will also be asked to use Course and project work to estimate candidates' likely attainment in external assessment.

Re-submission of project work

You will be providing on-going guidance and support to candidates taking project-type assessments, which means that the evidence candidates eventually submit for external assessment should be familiar to you and closely aligned to your estimates of their likely attainment in external assessment.

Where a candidate is unsuccessful in the external assessment, or achieves a grade lower than the one he or she had expected to attain, you should be in a position to advise them on why this has occurred, and what needs to be done to improve the project evidence for re-submission in the following session. We cannot provide detailed feedback on an individual candidate's work, but should be able to provide feedback in the form of a report to your centre on the general standard of your candidates' project evidence.

SQA's role: arriving at assessment decisions

SQA is responsible for publishing details of annual examination diets, for providing information on these, and for issuing specimen question papers and other types of assessment specification to

centres in good time. We are busy throughout the year in ensuring there are sufficient, appropriate specialists available to:

- ◆ create question papers and other assessment specifications
- ◆ mark question papers or offer visiting assessment/examining where required
- ◆ quality assure assessment decisions

This involves a continuous programme of recruiting, appointing, training, deploying and monitoring large numbers of invigilators, setters, markers, examiners, visiting assessors and external moderators.

It is important that those delivering SQA qualifications are closely involved in the process of external assessment as well as internal assessment. The vast majority of SQA markers, setters and visiting assessors are practicing teachers. Because of the growing number of National Courses, the existing teams of examiners and markers are being expanded to include more personnel from the further and higher education institutions that offer these courses.

The process of externally assessing candidates varies slightly, depending on the external assessment approach used. In general there are three stages to the process:

- ◆ preliminary assessment decisions
- ◆ interim assessment decisions
- ◆ final assessment decisions

Arriving at preliminary assessment decisions

Question papers

Completed candidate question papers, or ‘scripts’, are returned to us and allocated to markers. Each marker’s batch of work is randomly allocated to ensure that the examination scripts from one centre are not all marked by one marker. This also ensures that markers are in a position to consider work from a range of centres.

There are markers’ training events for each qualification to be assessed — all markers are required to attend. All are expected to have marked a sample of scripts before the meeting as a check on the validity and reliability of the marking instructions.

It is the Principal Assessor’s responsibility to deal with queries and finalise the marking scheme. Markers have two to three weeks to complete the marking of their allocated candidate scripts. If they encounter problems they can contact the Principal Assessor for advice. When all marking is complete the data on candidate attainment is ready for input into our Awards Processing System.

In a few subjects with smaller presentation groups of candidates, such as Classical Greek, central marking can be used. This allows the complete process of training, marking, and standardisation of marking to take place at a central location, generally over a weekend.

Projects or coursework (including observation of performance, skill demonstrations or oral assessment)

In some instances projects or coursework can be marked in the same way as scripts. Candidates’ project evidence (folios, tapes etc) is sent to individual markers, who mark them against the marking criteria. These criteria are generally broader or more holistic than those used for assessing question papers. Where the nature of the activity means that assessment is likely to be particularly subjective, for example assessing Expressive Activity in Art & Design, double marking is used. The Principal Assessor is responsible for adjudicating discrepancies between assessors.

Where projects or coursework generate bulky or short-lived products, SQA assessors or moderators will visit your centre to judge candidates' work. If a specific approach is required for the subject or Course, you will be provided with instructions about this. For example, if you are required to present bulky craft and design products to a visiting assessor, you may be asked to organise it as a mini exhibition.

Assessors will also visit centres where the project or coursework assessment involves observing candidates' performance, or demonstration of their process skills, and in this type of situation you could be asked to set up the performance or demonstration.

Where the main approach to external assessment is through oral assessment, or observation of performance or skill demonstration, you will be asked to agree a date with the SQA visiting assessor for him/her to visit your centre.

These processes are used to check the consistency of assessment decisions for projects or coursework. The visiting assessors and the external moderators are all trained by, and work under the direction of, the Principal Assessor for the subject in question. Visiting assessors are provided with standardised marking instructions to ensure the consistency of their assessment decisions.

The Principal Assessors for the subject area will monitor and check their assessment decisions.

Arriving at interim assessment decisions

Question papers

In this stage of the external assessment process, scripts that have been marked by individual markers are subject to a quality assurance test to check on the consistency of assessment decision with the aim of increasing the reliability of assessment decisions. Once the markers have returned the scripts to us, their work is checked by an examining team for each subject area — the examiners are themselves experienced markers. The examining team re-mark a sample of the work of each marker, and make a judgement as to whether or not the marker has applied the marking scheme accurately and consistently.

Large deviations cause us the most problems — inconsistencies, lenience or severity. We deal with relatively small deviations by using the information to prioritise scripts near grade borderlines for a re-mark.

For National Courses we will use the Standard Grade approach, but assessment decisions will be based on both the information we have gathered about the accuracy and consistency of the marking and on the estimates of candidates' attainment you provide. So, for example, a script would be prioritised for re-marking where it is found to have been marked by a severe marker and where your estimate suggests a better grade or mark should have been achieved. In this kind of situation any scripts marked just below the cut-off or pass mark would be treated as the highest priority.

The scrutiny of marked candidate scripts is also very important for informing decisions about the future employment of markers. Only consistent markers are re-employed to mark in subsequent examination diets.

Oral assessments, observation of performance and skill demonstrations

The work of visiting assessors/examiners is checked by the Principal Assessor to ensure the consistency of assessment decisions.

Arriving at final assessment decisions

We make our final decisions about awards each year (or examination diet) on the basis of evidence arising from a combination of statistical and evaluative information. This combined process is

used because, despite the careful planning to create valid assessment instruments, and the rigorous procedures we use to ensure that these are consistently applied when candidates' work is being assessed, assessment is not a perfect science and is subject to a degree of measurement error. It is particularly difficult to create assessments of equal demand, year on year, within and across subjects at a level.

We hold a series of meetings of SQA senior staff, Principal Assessors for the subject, and statisticians. We use statistical information to arrive at decisions on cut-off scores and pass marks. This includes information on:

- ◆ the distribution of marks candidates attained for the examination under consideration
- ◆ the distribution of grades awarded over the previous three years in the subject (at the same stage in the process)
- ◆ the proportion of candidates that centres considered should attain the various grades in the current year and previous three years (ie estimate grades).

This allows us to discuss various scenarios. Principal Assessors can provide an informed view of the extent to which the examination in question has performed as expected, and also on the nature of the 'candidature' for that year. It may be, for example, that they recognised a real improvement in the attainments of candidates in a particular part of the course in that year. If, after further investigation, this improvement is found to stem from enhanced candidate performance, this would result in an increase in pass rates and no change in pass marks. Once this discussion has taken place, the group makes decisions about pass marks and cut-off scores for each qualification for that year.

After pass marks or cut-offs have been decided, we can make decisions about individual candidates' attainment, based on the pass mark decisions and the estimates. This part of the process is computerised, which means we are able to make decisions that are consistent across centres, subjects and levels. Also, these decisions are made before candidates receive their certificates, which means that the assessment decisions reported to candidates are more reliable and you should find that you do not need to submit as many appeals to us. This process is known as the pre-results review, and it is a process from which many candidates benefit.

After the external assessment process is complete there is a continuous process of re-appraising each external assessment paper against a range of indicators. Surveys are carried out on the validity of the papers and a post-test analysis is carried out to check on the reliability of the external assessments. These inform the training of personnel, which in turn affects the quality of future assessment instruments.

Links between internal and external assessment

Course assessments sample the knowledge-base or contexts of the whole Course programme, and there are inevitably links between the internal and the external assessment systems. With National Courses, for example, candidates have to achieve Course Units as well as the external assessment for the Course. This guarantees that they have achieved the main Outcomes of the Course even if they have performed less well in some areas of the Course assessment than in others. There will be a modest level of compensation available where candidates have passed the Course assessment at grade A but do not have evidence for an Outcome of one of the component Units. In such cases the candidate will — through the assessment appeals process — be certificated for the Course, including all component Units.

Some Course assessments include more than one assessment activity and, to reach decisions on candidates' attainment of the Course, the results of the various assessment activities have to be taken together or 'aggregated'. For example, some National Courses will be externally assessed by a question paper plus some form of practical activity, and candidates' performances in both of

these activities have to be taken into account. This means that there could be groups of candidates in your centre who all achieve the same final grade for a Course but exhibit different strengths across the coursework and the range of assessment tasks.

In other National Courses, candidates' evidence will be used for two purposes: for the internal assessment of the Units and to contribute to the external assessment of the Course. Where it is impractical to externally-assess the evidence arising from National Course assessments, for example because it is a performance or is bulky, it will be internally assessed and intensively externally moderated.

8 Special assessment and certification arrangements

There are full details in our publication *Guidance on Special Assessment Arrangements* (AA0645/2, December 2001).

Introduction

Special assessment and certification arrangements can be applied to all SQA qualifications. This section of the guide gives general guidelines for making requests for candidates who require either special external or internal assessment arrangements.

It is important to note that where special assessment arrangements are applied, they may result in an amended certificate being issued. Each case is looked at individually in accordance with the general guidelines outlined here.

Principles of special assessment arrangements

Special assessment arrangements are intended to enable candidates to demonstrate their level of attainment in relation to the qualification standards. They are not intended to compensate for lack of attainment and should not:

- ◆ give an unfair advantage to candidates
- ◆ reduce the validity and reliability of the assessment or compromise the credibility of the award
- ◆ mislead users of SQA certificates about candidates' attainment

Candidates with a physical disability, a sensory impairment, a specific learning difficulty, or a temporary disability at the time of the assessment may be eligible for special assessment arrangements in line with these principles.

General guidance on special assessment arrangements

Special assessment arrangements should, as far as possible, reflect candidates' usual methods of working. The arrangements permitted depend on the circumstances of individual candidates and should do no more than is necessary to allow candidates to demonstrate attainment.

As assessment arrangements vary depending on the qualification concerned, candidates' needs for special assessment arrangements will also vary. It is important to consider whether candidates need the same arrangements for all assessments.

Candidates do not need to have a Record of Needs to be eligible for special assessment arrangements, nor do candidates who have a Record of Needs automatically qualify.

Examples of the types of special assessment arrangements which can be applied include:

- ◆ alternative interpretation of outcomes
- ◆ amendments to qualifications
- ◆ assistance in a practical assessment
- ◆ extra time allowances
- ◆ rest periods/supervised breaks
- ◆ transcription without correction

- ◆ linguistic support
- ◆ signing in assessments
- ◆ assistance in aural assessments
- ◆ adapted question papers for candidates with visual impairment
- ◆ referral of candidates' scripts to the Principal Assessor
- ◆ the use of a bilingual dictionary for candidates whose first language is not English

All requests for special assessment arrangements must be agreed by your Head of Centre before being made to SQA, with whom all decisions will rest. If you disagree with our decision, your Head of Centre can appeal using the process described in SQA's publication *The Appeals Process* (A0690/3, June 2002 — currently being revised).

Special arrangements for internal assessment

Providing that the assessment is able to generate the required evidence that candidates have achieved all the outcomes of a Unit and have met the assessment criteria, approval for special assessment arrangements may not be necessary. If there is any doubt as to the acceptability of your arrangements, you should seek approval from us.

Special arrangements for external assessment

Special external assessment arrangements may be tailored as far as possible to meet particular needs of individual candidates. You should seek approval from us for the assessment arrangements which best suit candidates.

In both internal and external assessment, we will require information about candidates to support requests for special assessment arrangements. You should provide details on the precise nature of candidates' difficulties and the effect on candidates' performance in assessment. In the case of candidates with learning difficulties, it is expected that an educational psychologist will have been involved at some stage in identifying candidates' specific difficulties.

Information technology in assessments

We recognise the importance of information technology in promoting independence in both internal and external assessment, but you should always ensure that Unit or Course documentation does not preclude the use of IT in assessment. If there is any doubt, consult SQA.

General guidance on special certification arrangements

Where special assessment arrangements lead to significant modification of assessment requirements or the use of alternative interpretations of outcomes, this may be indicated by an annotated certificate. The Certificate will have an asterisk against the qualification(s) concerned and the following statement on the reverse side:

Certain aspects of the assessment for this award were amended or restricted to meet the particular needs of this candidate. Details of these changes are available from SQA on request.

Where it is necessary to annotate a Certificate, this does not mean that the assessment concerned has been made easier. It simply means that conditions of assessment were tailored to the needs of particular candidates.

9 Quality auditing

Devolved authority

We have a system for devolving authority for certain aspects of quality assurance to centres which seek it. A *quality audit* is the means by which we check to ensure that centres have systems in place to enable them to take on this authority.

Centres can be granted devolved authority where:

- ◆ this is consistent with the maintenance of national standards
- ◆ they have been successfully audited against the appropriate quality elements and criteria

The quality assurance elements (see page 10) for which authority can be devolved are:

- ◆ approval to offer specific SQA qualifications (see section 4, page 15)
- ◆ validation (see section 3, page 13)

Section C: More about SQA qualifications

1 National Qualifications

'National Qualifications' is the name of the group of qualifications which includes those developed as a result of the Higher Still Development Programme, namely National Units, National Courses, National Clusters and SGAs at these levels:

- ◆ Access 2 and 3
- ◆ Intermediate 1
- ◆ Intermediate 2
- ◆ Higher
- ◆ Advanced Higher

The National Qualifications group also includes all of the following:

- ◆ General Scottish Vocational Qualifications (GSVQs) — continuing until 2004
- ◆ Lifestart and Workstart — continuing until 2004
- ◆ National Certificate Clusters — continuing indefinitely

There is information on these existing qualifications later in this section (see page 58).

National Units

Features of National Units

National Units are specified in terms of:

- ◆ Outcomes
- ◆ Performance Criteria
- ◆ Evidence Requirements

Some National Unit specifications also include information on the range of skills and/or knowledge to be assessed.

In addition, each specification includes support notes, guidance on learning and teaching approaches and guidance on approaches to assessment.

Requirements of National Units

National Units, which are internally assessed, are subject to external moderation and awarded on the basis of evidence of the successful attainment of all the outcomes. The Performance Criteria define the standard of performance required to attain the outcomes.

Assessment instruments for the Units are designed to elicit evidence relating to the Performance Criteria. Evidence relating to each Performance Criterion is generally required for Units that assess a range of skills, whereas for some of the more knowledge-based Units, the assessment instruments may use a more holistic approach. These can be designed to incorporate the Performance Criteria into the marking scheme. With this type of assessment instrument it is acceptable to infer attainment for some of the Performance Criteria by using appropriate cut-off scores to arrive at the assessment decision for the Outcome, or even for the Unit. In such cases the notional cut-off score would be in the region of 70% for outcomes. For Units, the cut-off score has to be set at a level that ensures that candidates have achieved overall competence for the Unit.

The National Assessment Bank

Units that contribute to National Courses are generally supported by items in the National Assessment Bank (NAB). The NAB also contains assessment instruments for all National Units that feature in the mandatory section of Scottish Group Award specifications, whether or not these feature as part of Courses. Each assessment instrument is accompanied by a marking scheme and, where appropriate, suggested cut-off scores.

NAB assessment instruments are not mandatory, but you are advised to use them where they are available, especially in the first few years of implementation of National Qualifications. That way you can be assured that the assessment instruments you use are valid and, by applying the marking scheme and cut-offs carefully, your assessment decisions should be reliable. While these instruments are not confidential in the way that external question papers are, you are advised to consider in advance whether or not you would want to re-use NAB assessments. (In curricular areas where assessments have to sample across the knowledge requirements of the Course, we intend eventually to make up to five assessment instruments available. However, this cannot happen immediately, so the NAB instrument should be kept confidential.)

Devising your own assessment for National Units

If you choose to devise your own assessment instruments and assessment schemes, you should follow the advice on internal moderation in Section 6. You might also wish to seek prior moderation (see page 29) of your assessment from us. If you use this approach you can be confident about the validity of your assessments. If you then find that you have to re-consider some of your assessment decisions, perhaps as a result of internal or external moderation findings, you can be confident that the assessment specification is not at fault and that it can be used again with candidates.

National Clusters 2 and 3

At Access levels, groups of Units have been designed together to form coherent learning packages, similar to Courses, but with no external assessment. These are called National Clusters.

National Courses

Features of National Courses

National Courses are made up of three 40-hour Units, or the equivalent in terms of fractional-credit or multiple-credit Units. Also, the Courses are designed to include an additional 40 hours for induction, consolidation, remediation and preparation for external assessment. The external assessment is designed to assess across the component Course Units and to assess the candidate's ability to retain, integrate and apply the knowledge and skills acquired in the Units. External Course assessments provide the basis for grading.

Hierarchies

There can be hierarchies of National Courses at different levels. Where this is the case candidates who achieve the Course Units at one level but narrowly fail to achieve the external assessment at that level are automatically awarded the Course at the level below (at grade A). Their certificates would, however, recognise that they have achieved the Units at the upper level. You would also be able to make an appeal to improve the Course grade if you thought that the evidence you held could support an improvement.

Requirements of National Courses (Course assessments)

National Courses were produced in two phases of development. All of the Courses at the same level have been designed with the aim of making them equivalent in demand and in most respects with the same arrangements and conditions for assessment. There are differences though.

- ◆ The majority of the Courses which were developed at the start of the Higher Still programme are assessed in total, or in part, through centrally-devised question papers. Some of the Courses use elements of coursework or projects, generally in conjunction with SQA-invigilated examinations. Time-allocations and conditions for assessment for the Course assessments vary according to the assessment instruments used in each case. The Arrangements documents for the Courses provide information on these.
- ◆ These courses have grade descriptions in the form of broad criteria for attainment necessary to achieve grade C and grade A. These grades underpin the detailed marking instructions devised for each course assessment. Grade B will be decided statistically rather than judgementally.
- ◆ The more recently-developed National Courses use ‘project-type’ assessment as the main approach. These projects incorporate some assessment activities to be carried out in examination room conditions. The projects take the form of Investigations, Practical Assignments, or Extended Case-Studies. The time allocations and conditions for assessment for these have been standardised as much as possible, and are outlined in the Arrangements for External Assessment for Scottish Group Awards. The individual project specifications for each Course will clarify these arrangements further. The three stages — ie planning, developing and evaluating — have a separate mark allocation; the project is awarded an aggregated mark which is compared to grade descriptions, and candidate attainment can be graded A, B or C. Work is ongoing to produce individual tailored marking instructions for each project specification.

Estimating attainment in National Courses

Estimates are used for all National Courses. It is your responsibility to provide Course estimates and to decide on the nature of the information estimates are derived from.

For Courses assessed using question papers, estimates could be based on:

- ◆ evidence arising from Unit assessments
- ◆ National Assessment Bank assessment
- ◆ prelims devised by your centre and modelled on specimen Course assessment papers

or a combination of these. If you are using NAB materials, you should consider combining two Unit assessments, including those parts which offer sufficient headroom to allow candidates to demonstrate performance reflecting the ‘added value’ of the Courses at grades A, B and C. Whichever source of evidence you use, it is valuable if at least part of it is produced under controlled conditions to replicate the assessment in the external Course assessment, for example assessments taken in examination-room conditions.

For Courses based predominately on project assessment, Course estimates could be based on evidence from Unit assessments or from draft project evidence. Either way, the material used must allow the necessary headroom for you to display grades A and B, as well as grade C attainment.

Scottish Group Awards

Features of Scottish Group Awards

Scottish Group Awards (SGAs) are available at six levels, from Access 2 to Advanced Higher. Attainment of an SGA indicates that candidates have:

- ◆ undertaken a coherent programme of study
- ◆ achieved the knowledge and skills necessary for particular progression routes
- ◆ reached a certain level of educational attainment
- ◆ achieved a certain level of Core Skills competence

There are two types of Scottish Group Award: *named* SGAs and *general* SGAs. Both types have to meet specifications relating to the number of Courses and Units, and the level of Core Skills, required for the qualification.

Named Scottish Group Awards have specific requirements in terms of the subject content of the Units and Courses to be included in the award specification.

General Scottish Group Awards are designed to allow centres more flexibility to create programmes not covered by the named Scottish Group Awards. The specification is, therefore, defined in more general terms.

The types of Scottish Group Awards available at each level are:

Access 2	three general Scottish Group Awards
Access 3	three general Scottish Group Awards
Intermediate 1	one general Scottish Group Award
Intermediate 2	one general and a range of named Scottish Group Awards
Higher	one general and a range of named Scottish Group Awards
Advanced Higher	one general Scottish Group Award

Authorisation of general Scottish Group Awards

General Scottish Group Awards are available at all levels from Access 2 through to Advanced Higher. At Intermediate 2 and Higher this is in addition to the range of named SGAs. For all SGAs, the programme selected by any candidate also has to meet the demands of the Group Award in terms of the number and level of Unit and assessment credits which comprise it, including Core Skills.

For named SGAs, candidates' programme choice is limited by the specification. There are no such restrictions on general SGAs, other than the requirement that the programme should be demonstrably coherent. To help ensure that programmes are coherent, our authorisation process will check on the particular combinations of Units and Courses your candidates choose for general SGAs. This procedure should not be confused with validation — the general SGA is already validated.

In some cases, candidates may want to study a group of subjects which is generally broad in scope, so keeping their options open at the next stage of their education or training. For other candidates, the named SGA may not be quite specialist enough for their progression needs. The general SGA and the authorisation procedure will be able to deal with both types of situation. The general SGA will also be available for candidates who could achieve a named SGA, but do not wish to commit themselves to the area of study indicated by the title of the named SGA.

In due course, as we build up a database of routes which have been authorised, it may be possible to provide centres with a list of pre-authorised groupings of subjects. This should help cut down on the administrative load for centre staff.

For other programmes you will need to go through the following steps.

- ◆ Provide guidance to the candidates when they are selecting their subjects, ensuring that the programme meets the level requirements in terms of Unit and assessment credits that it has coherence, and allows progression for the candidates. At this stage check also for appropriate Core Skill coverage in the programme.
- ◆ Check whether the subjects chosen would satisfy the conditions for any named SGA. If they do, the candidate(s) should choose whether to enter for the named award or the general SGA. (Named awards are, by their nature, already authorised.)
- ◆ If the candidate chooses the general SGA, complete form SGA1. You may have one candidate or many wishing to follow the programme, but you only need to fill in one form per programme. The form asks you about the rationale (aims and objectives) of the programme, about possible progression, and how the assessment credits selected will ensure that the programme meets its aims. You will then be asked to list the Units and/or Courses which the candidate has selected. As in all SGAs, candidates can draw on already completed qualifications, for example Standard Grades or SVQs. Form SGA1 is not a check on whether or not the candidate has these qualifications — it merely allows us to see how you propose to put the Group Award together.
- ◆ Send the form to SQA.

We will then check to see that your programme meets all the requirements of the general SGA at that level, that it does not match a named Group Award exactly, and that it has coherence and allows progression. We will notify you of the outcome of authorisation and advise of any further action required.

You should bear in mind that approval issues may surface when you enter the candidate(s) for the programme. It would therefore be prudent to check on the approval status of all the Units and/or Courses which comprise the programme earlier rather than later.

Requirements of Scottish Group Awards

To achieve a Scottish Group Award, candidates must attain a specified number and level of Courses and Units and a specified range of Core Skills. The specifications for Scottish Group Awards provide full details of the number of credits required and the mandatory Core Skills requirement.

A certain degree of substitution of Unit and assessment credits is permitted. For example, it is possible to substitute:

- ◆ Some assessment credits for Unit credits, at the appropriate level. For example, in an SGA at Higher level, three Courses at Higher and two Courses at Intermediate 2 would meet the requirements for the SGA (the two Intermediate 2 assessment credits would substitute for two Intermediate 2 Unit credits).
- ◆ Other qualifications which have been benchmarked at the appropriate level. For example, three Higher Courses plus two Standard Grades at Credit level, or SVQs at the appropriate level would meet the requirements for an SGA at Higher.

The specifications for Scottish Group Awards provide details on the permitted substitutions for the qualifications.

Other National Qualifications

SQA qualifications which are being replaced or renamed

From August 1999 (or August 2000 for qualifications at Advanced Higher):

- ◆ SCOTVEC National Certificate Modules and SEB Short Courses have been called National Units
- ◆ SCE Higher Grades have been replaced by National Courses at Higher level.
- ◆ Certificate in Sixth Year Studies (CSYS) Courses have been replaced by National Courses at Advanced Higher
- ◆ General Scottish Vocational Qualifications (GSVQs at levels I, II and III) are being replaced by Scottish Group Awards (SGAs at Intermediate 1, Intermediate 2 and Higher)
- ◆ Skillstart 1 and 2 is being replaced by revised versions called Skillstart Access 2 and Skillstart Access 3
- ◆ Lifestart and Workstart are being replaced by SGAs at Access 2

In addition:

- ◆ National Clusters have been introduced at Access 2 and 3
- ◆ Standard Grades have retained their titles but have become National Courses

2

Core Skills

Core Skills are the transferable skills that enable individuals to apply their knowledge and understanding to everyday situations.

The Core Skills framework includes the following five Core Skills (the first three have more than one component, making a total of nine Core Skills components). These are available at five levels, from Access 2 to Higher.

Problem Solving Critical Thinking Planning and Organising Reviewing and Evaluating
Communication Oral Communication Written Communication
Numeracy Using Graphical Information Using Number
Information Technology
Working With Others

Achieving Core Skills

In some SQA qualifications, the Core Skills are clearly identified as separate Units. When a candidate achieves these, they are recorded on the certificate along with other free-standing Units. The Core Skills are also recorded in the Core Skills profile, which is a feature of all Scottish Qualifications Certificates. Where separate Core Skills Units are used, they are assessed in the same way as other Units, and the same quality assurance procedures apply.

In other qualifications, Core Skills are embedded in specialist Units or Courses. In these cases, candidates' achievement of the Core Skill is recognised through the Core Skills profile. All National Courses have been audited to identify any Core Skills that can be attained through completion of the Course or Units within it. A number of non-Course Units have also been audited.

Where the Core Skill is built into another qualification, it is assessed as a natural part of that qualification, so the certification of the Core Skill is automatic.

In some cases, candidates may find that they have completed some of the components of a Core Skill, but not others. Where this is the case, candidates can enter for the relevant Core Skills Unit, and complete assessment only for the Outcomes that cover the missing components. For moderation, it is helpful to indicate in the candidate's evidence which Outcomes/components have already been covered — a copy of the candidate's Core Skills profile should be included for the Moderator to check. Further advice on this method of 'topping-up' Core Skills assessment can be found in the National Assessment Bank packs for the Core Skills Units.

Core Skills in SGAs

Achievement of Core Skills is a requirement of all SGAs. Candidates have to achieve the five Core Skills at the appropriate level — this is generally set at the level below the overall level of the SGA. Candidates can achieve the Core Skills either by gaining Core Skills Units, or by gaining

National Courses and National Units that have the Core Skills built in. Candidates may also gain recognition of Core Skills through previously-achieved Units, Courses or Standard Grades that have been audited for Core Skills content.

Standard Grades

All Standard Grades have been audited against the Core Skills framework. Candidates who achieve Standard Grades will gain recognition for Core Skills achievement through the Core Skills profile and will be able to use this when working toward other SQA qualifications.

Core Skills in SVQs

As well as National Units in Core Skills, there are also separate Workplace Core Skills Units. These use the same standards as the National Units, but are in a different format. Workplace Core Skills are used in Modern Apprenticeships, or more generally in the workplace, and can be found in some SVQs. A full set of support materials for these Units can be downloaded from SQA's website: www.sqa.org.uk.

Workplace Core Skills are recognised through the Core Skills profile, so they can be used when working towards other qualifications, such as Scottish Group Awards.

Higher National Certificates and Higher National Diplomas

Although HNCs and HNDs do not currently contain Core Skills in the form of discrete Units, there are core-type Units in areas such as Communication in some HNCs and HNDs. Where these are included, they may be mandatory for the HNC or HND programme.

From 2001, three new HNC/HNDs are being piloted. These pilots have been designed to meet a range of new design rules, some of which concern Core Skills. Core Skills in HNCs and HNDs could be delivered or achieved in a number of ways. In some cases they could be embedded in existing Units.

Section D: Appeals and equal opportunities

The appeals policy and process

The process of assessing and quality assuring our qualifications involves us in making a number of decisions affecting your centre. If you are the Head of Centre you, or your representative, can appeal against decisions taken by our officers — if you do not agree with them.

There are several SQA publications which address the issue of assessment appeals:

- ◆ *Estimates and Assessment Appeals: Guidance on generating evidence* (A0992/2, March 2001) provides general and subject specific advice on submitting evidence for estimates and appeals.
- ◆ *Appeals: how the system works* (FD1379/2, June 2003) is a leaflet which can be given to candidates (and their parents) explaining the grounds on which appeals against awards in National Courses can be made.
- ◆ We have produced exemplification of the evidence required to support appeals in National Courses in various subjects.
- ◆ The grounds on which you can appeal are explained in *The Appeals Process: a guide for centres* (AA0690, June 2002). The booklet has three parts. The first part lists the decisions taken by our officers against which you can appeal, ie decisions on:
 - approval
 - external moderation of internal assessment
 - validation
 - quality auditing
 - external assessment
 - special assessment arrangements
 - penalties applied to candidate awards in cases of malpractice

The second part of the booklet explains how to appeal to SQA if you disagree with our decisions — it tells you who to talk to before submitting an appeal, and when to put your appeal in writing.

The third part of the booklet explains how the Appeals Sub-Committee will consider appeals and how you will be advised of the outcome of the appeals process.

Copies of all of the publications listed above are available from SQA's Customer Contact Centre — 0141-242 2214.

Equal opportunities policy for SQA in its awarding body role

Background

We view our equal opportunities policy not as an end in itself but as a framework within which equal opportunity actions and initiatives can be carried out. All of the centres with which we operate either implement an equal opportunities policy of their own which we monitor for effectiveness (eg colleges of further education, private training providers) or come under the umbrella of a wider equal opportunities policy of such organisations as local authorities (eg schools).

The main purpose of the policy is to reinforce existing equal opportunities policies within centres and to encourage positive action. It is not intended to be imposed on centres, but should be regarded as complementary to existing policies and a re-affirmation of our commitment to consistently-applied national standards and fairness to candidates.

SQA's updated policy is based on a number of equal opportunities related activities which have been established over a period of time. These include:

- ◆ providing guidelines for setters of centrally-devised assessment tasks such as question papers (the checklists which we issue to setters are included in this section)
- ◆ discussing equal opportunities issues at training events for SQA appointees such as setters of centrally-devised assessment tasks and external moderators
- ◆ monitoring wording of centrally-devised assessment tasks, eg question papers
- ◆ checking marking which is carried out by SQA-appointed markers for evidence of bias
- ◆ developing systems for statistical monitoring of gender-related issues at national level
- ◆ approving and monitoring centres to ensure that they are implementing an equal opportunities policy for candidates undertaking SQA qualifications

Equal opportunities policy statement

The Scottish Qualifications Authority wholeheartedly supports the principle of equal opportunities in employment, education and training and opposes all forms of unlawful direct¹ and indirect² discrimination on the grounds of colour, race, religion, ethnic origin, nationality, gender, sexual orientation, age, marital status or disability. To this end, within the framework of the law, we are committed, wherever practicable, to promoting and facilitating access to our qualifications. We work in partnership with centres to promote equal opportunities in the wider community within which we operate.

¹ Direct discrimination occurs when a person is treated less favourably than others on grounds of colour, race, religion, ethnic origin, nationality (including citizenship), gender, sexual orientation, age, marital status or disability. An example of direct discrimination in the context of assessment would be where candidates are given lower grades for their performance in assessments on the grounds of gender.

² Indirect discrimination occurs where a rule or condition or requirement which applies equally to everyone has a disproportionately adverse effect on any person or persons on the grounds of colour, race, religion, ethnic origin, nationality (including citizenship), gender, sexual orientation, age, marital status or disability and there is no objective justification for the rule. An example of indirect discrimination in the context of assessment would be where assessment instruments are culturally biased and result in lower grades for a significant proportion of candidates from (particular) ethnic minorities.

In practice this means that every possible step will be taken to ensure that we:

- ◆ produce worthwhile qualifications which are accessible to all candidates who are potentially able to achieve them
- ◆ develop methods of assessment and quality assurance which are sensitive to the needs of all candidates but which do not compromise the overarching aims of fairness and consistency

To implement our equal opportunities policy we will:

- ◆ disseminate our equal opportunities policy to centres which are offering SQA qualifications so that it can be incorporated in information to candidates
- ◆ provide qualifications which have been subject to an open and clearly defined validation process: where small representative groups are brought together by SQA for validation or revalidation purposes, we will monitor the composition of the groups
- ◆ ensure that criteria which define required candidate performance to achieve our qualifications are appropriate to purpose, present no unnecessary barriers, and are in the public domain
- ◆ produce checklists to be used by all writers of centrally-devised qualifications and assessment material
- ◆ provide training in equal opportunities for setters of external assessments
- ◆ ensure that our quality assurance framework is based on principles which facilitate access to qualifications, and that those principles are communicated clearly to centres
- ◆ provide guidance for those candidates who think that they have been treated unfairly or have been discriminated against, within the framework of SQA's equal opportunities policy*
- ◆ ensure that all our publications and promotional literature are written clearly and are designed to be as inclusive as possible

***A note for candidates**

It is important to note that the purpose of SQA's equal opportunities policy is to reinforce policies within centres.

If you think that you have been discriminated against, we advise you to:

- ◆ discuss the issue with a member of staff in your centre (eg guidance teacher, student adviser, mentor) and ask for information about the centre's equal opportunities policy
- ◆ ask for advice on the process within your centre for pursuing an equal opportunities-related issue

If your efforts to resolve the issue within the centre prove to be unsuccessful please put your complaint in writing to SQA and provide details of the way in which you tried to resolve the issue within the centre. Once we consider your complaint, we will respond to you in writing.

Action to monitor the policy and its implementation

We will:

- ◆ sample qualifications and assessment material regularly, and report the Outcomes to the Qualifications Committees
- ◆ devise and implement systems for research and evidence-gathering to gauge the effectiveness of our equal opportunities objectives
- ◆ liaise with external agencies, where necessary, to agree methods for national statistical monitoring relating to equal opportunities

- ◆ ensure that both our equal opportunities policy and the way in which we implement it are subject to continuous review and are updated when necessary.

Guidelines for setters of assessment tasks

Checklist for checking cultural, racial or religious bias in assessment tasks

Every possible effort must be made to ensure that assessment tasks are free of cultural, racial or religious bias. You must bear in mind the linguistic and cultural diversity of modern Scottish society, and the value to all candidates of incorporating assessment tasks which reflect such diversity. Many candidates in multi-racial Scotland are familiar with more than one culture.

Taking the assessment task as a whole, you should be able to answer ‘yes’ to these questions:

- 1 Where people are portrayed in pictures, illustrations and examples, do they represent a variety of cultural backgrounds, and in reasonable proportions?
- 2 Is the portrayal of other cultures balanced and not represented as ‘poor’, ‘primitive’, ‘backward’ or ‘exotic’?
- 3 Are people from a variety of cultural backgrounds shown to be taking an equal and active part as parents and members of families?
- 4 Are people from a variety of cultural backgrounds shown to be participating equally in physical and practical activities? In scientific and technological activities? In artistic and creative activities? In domestic activities?
- 5 Are people from a variety of cultural backgrounds portrayed as being equally competent in both intellectual and practical activities?
- 6 Are people from a variety of cultural backgrounds portrayed as having equal status (eg in decision-making) at work and at home?
- 7 Are the situations and contexts used within the experience of students from a variety of cultural backgrounds?
- 8 Where illustrations of different racial groups are used, do they reflect the distinctive physical features of such groups rather than presenting everyone as Caucasian, merely with darker or lighter skin colour? And are they dressed in non-stereotypical fashion?
- 9 Are words with racially-sensitive connotations avoided?
- 10 In social subjects in particular, and, in some cases, in English and Communication:
 - a are the customs, life-styles and traditions of people of developing countries presented in a manner which reflects the value, meaning and role of these customs in the life of the people?
 - b is the role of people in developing countries in shaping their society, and in historical events — both in their own country and in the world — accurately presented from their perspective?
 - c where a text does reflect a biased or ethnocentric view or a cultural stereotype, does the question seek comment on this portrayal? (This may occur for example with authentic texts.)
 - d is the language of all groups treated with respect, and presented in the proper rhythm and cadence?

Taking each question separately, you should be able to answer ‘**no**’ to the following questions:

- 1 Do the text and related questions or assignments make assumptions about cultural, class or religious backgrounds which will make them inaccessible to any pupils?
- 2 Do the text and related questions or assignments make assumptions about cultural, class or religious backgrounds which will make them offensive or off-putting to any pupils?
- 3 In social subjects in particular and, in some cases, in foreign languages:
 - a do the passages and/or questions exclusively endorse European values, level of development, concepts, lifestyles and institutions and deem them to be automatically superior, without inviting comment on the viewpoint expressed?
 - b within the constraints of the Unit or Course, do the assessment instruments overall:
 - give scant attention to the history of non-European areas prior to contact with white people?
 - focus on ‘problems’ rather than ‘causes’ when considering the Developing World?
 - omit all reference to the possibility of a negative influence by the Western World on the Developing World?
 - c are power, leadership and competence to make decisions or initiate development represented solely as attributes of Europeans?
- 4 In creative and aesthetic subjects, within the constraints of the Unit or Course, are the assessment instruments as multi-cultural as they can be?

Guidelines for setters of assessment tasks

Checklist for gender bias in assessment tasks/items

While this checklist does not claim to be definitive it should assist in the preparation of fair and inclusive assessment tasks which relate to a contemporary environment.

Taking the assessment method as a whole, you should be able to answer ‘yes’ to these questions, subject to any possible constraints of the nature of the study involved:

- 1 Are females and males equally represented in the texts, illustrations and examples?
- 2 Are males and females shown taking an equal and active part as parents and members of families?
- 3 Are males and females shown participating equally in physical and practical activities? In scientific and technological activities? In artistic and creative activities? In domestic activities?
- 4 Are females and males portrayed as being equally competent in both intellectual and practical activities?
- 5 Are females and males portrayed as having equal status (eg in decision-making) at work and at home? (Check not only the role assigned, but any additional information such as illustrations which might suggest authority through body posture or positioning of males and females.)
- 6 When people are described in terms of role relationships (eg wife, husband, mother, father, manager, assistant) are both sexes treated in a balanced way?
- 7 Is the respective contribution of men and women to the shaping of society and their impact on history adequately presented?
- 8 Are situations and contexts used equally within the experience of girls and boys?
- 9 Is the word order relating to gender varied, ie not always ‘men and women’, ‘boys and girls’ and ‘he or she’?

Taking each question separately, you should be able to answer ‘no’ to these questions:

- 1 Is the male pronoun used to refer to all people?
- 2 Are men and women shown only in stereotyped roles (eg women as housewives, carers, secretaries, and men as managers, scientists, engineers, unemployed)?
- 3 Are occupations referred to in a gender-biased way (eg policeman rather than police officer; fireman rather than firefighter)?
- 4 When questions are contextualised, are boys and girls shown to have stereotypical interests (eg girls liking soft toys and magazines; boys liking computers)?
- 5 Are females portrayed in more passive roles (sitting, watching) and males in more active roles?
- 6 Are females shown in more sensitive roles and males shown in more aggressive roles?