



SQA's Customised Awards Service

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Introduction: what is a Customised Award?

Customised Awards are qualifications designed to allow the customer flexibility in the design, content and format of the qualification. Customised Awards can assist employers and employees in recognising and increasing skills and knowledge levels, and provide recognition and development opportunities for individuals. They can also help a company meet regulatory requirements and to demonstrate the competence of its employees to external parties.

A Customised Award consists of a collection of individual units. The number of units selected depends on the sophistication or complexity of the tasks, activities and/or knowledge involved and whether different pathways are required.

Customised Awards are flexible in their design. Depending on your needs, we can create Customised Awards which consist of purely mandatory units, a mixture of mandatory and optional units, or optional groupings of units. We can create frameworks with different exit points, eg Technician level, Senior Technician level.

Support is provided by SQA staff for the development of the units within the award, the creation of the award on SQA systems and the design of the certificates. The learning and assessment material is developed by the customer.

If you are unable to write the units or learning and assessment material yourself we can provide, for an additional cost, a Development Consultancy Service.

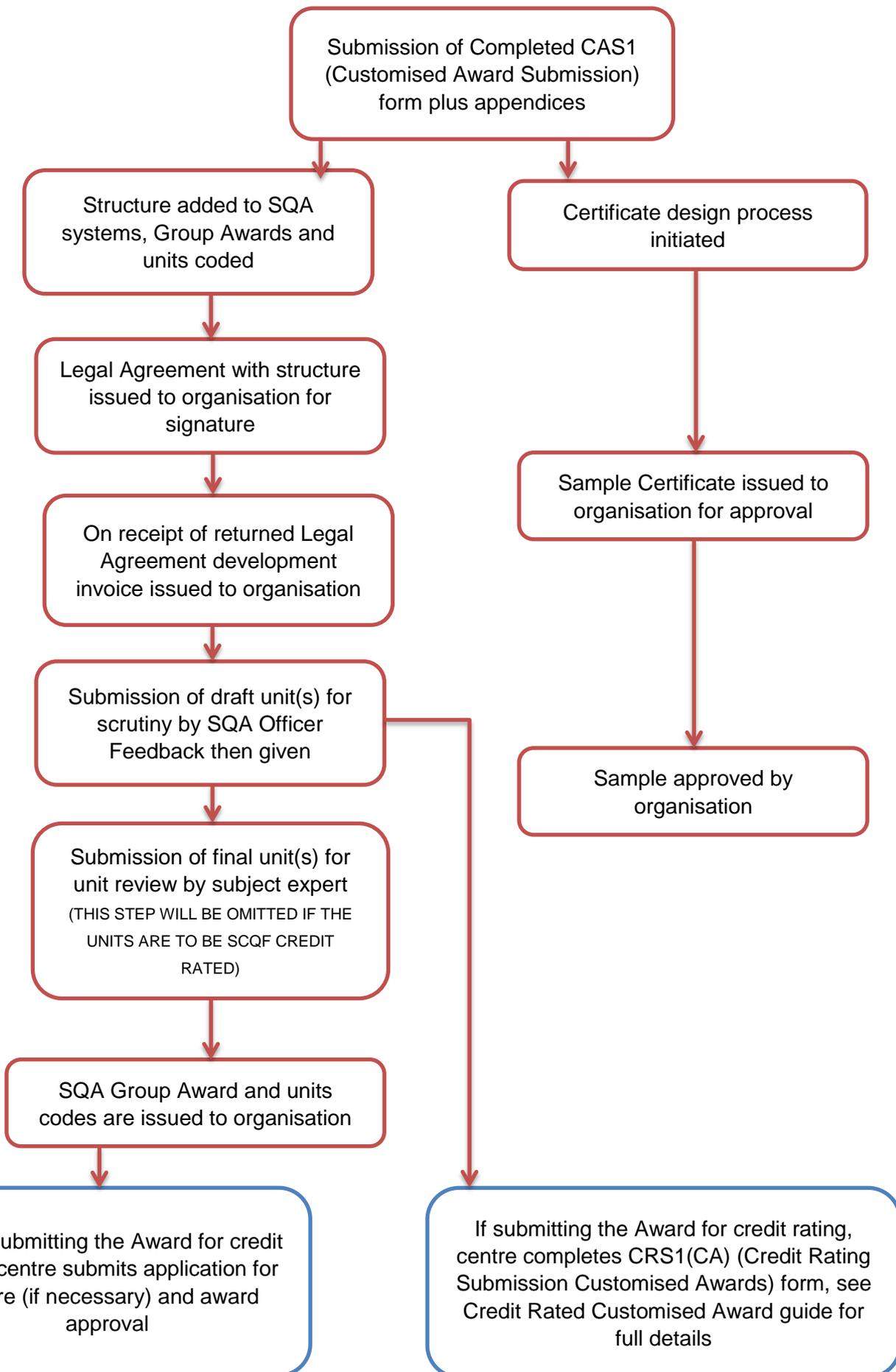
Our Business Development Section provides support to guide you through the centre and award approval process.

The benefits

A Customised Award can be integrated with your company's existing business and staff development processes. Used in this way, it can offer real benefits, for example:

- ◆ helping you achieve business objectives
- ◆ increasing skills levels and improving working practices and motivation
- ◆ assisting the management and development of human resource functions
- ◆ providing recognition and development opportunities for employees
- ◆ providing an official credit rating on the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF credit rating is an additional process/service)

The submission process



The submission process explained

CAS1 form

The first stage of the development process is to submit your completed CAS1 form. The next section, Submission of the CAS1 form, takes you through how to complete the form.

Structure and certificate design

On receipt of the completed CAS1, an SQA Officer will review the submission and if proceeding will begin the process of certificate design and creation of the units on the SQA system.

Agreement issued

Once we have the award structure on our system, a legal agreement will be issued. This confirms details of the award(s), the fees for development and other associated costs, such as external verification and entry certification fees.

Development invoice

On receipt of your signed agreement, we will issue the development invoice. If you are having your award credit rated this will normally be invoiced separately.

Draft units

If your award is still in development, helpful information on unit writing can be found in the Customised Awards *Unit Writing Guide*. Your allocated SQA Officer will be able to provide support on the presentation and format of the units, including carrying out a review of a sample unit.

Final units

The development will not progress further until we are in receipt of your final units. Once received there are two possible next steps:

- ◆ technical review
- ◆ SCQF Credit Rating

Technical review (where you are not applying for credit rating)

The SQA Officer will appoint a subject expert or experts who will carry out a technical review to confirm that the units are fit for purpose. If you will also be submitting the units/award for SCQF credit rating this step will be omitted as the units will be reviewed by a subject expert as part of the credit rating process.

or:

SCQF credit rating

If you are submitting the award to be credit rated then you would now complete and submit your credit rating submission. The relevant form is CRS1(CA) and is available from your allocated SQA Officer alongside the Credit Rated Customised Award Guide. You will submit your application for approval after the credit rating process is complete but can be preparing to make this application alongside the Customised Award development and credit rating process.

Approval

The final units will be passed to our Approval section and the next step for you is to apply for centre approval (if not already an approved SQA centre) and award approval. You will be supported through this process by your Business Development Manager and can be preparing to make your application alongside the Customised Award development.

Submission of the CAS1 form

In order to begin the process of customising your award you must submit a completed CAS1 form. Here we take you through the questions in the form.

General information

Please complete this section with up-to-date contact details and confirmation of which SQA-approved centres will be delivering the award.

If you are not already an SQA-approved centre then you will need to become one before you can be approved to deliver the Customised Award. Your Business Development Manager will take you through this process.

Section 1: Information for completion of legal agreement

1.1 Your organisation's full legal name

Please confirm the organisation name which should be listed on the legal agreement for the Customised Award.

1.2 Your organisation's full address

Again, if this is different from the address which you have provided as a contact address for the Customised Award development, please list this here.

1.3 Your organisation's company number

If you are registered with Companies House you will have a company number; please list this here.

1.4 Name and designation of signatory for Customised Award Agreement

Please confirm to whom the agreement should be issued for signing and their designation within the organisation.

Section 2: About your organisation

2.1 Please give a brief summary of your organisation's background/history

Include here the type, nature and legal status of your organisation, eg private company, voluntary organisation, awarding body, professional body. Indicate, for example, the origins of your organisation, how long it has been in existence, and how it has developed over time, indicating relevant significant changes in direction or purpose. Include details of parent organisations or groups, if appropriate.

2.2 Please give a brief summary of the main products and/or services provided by the organisation and the main customers for these

Detail here the main products and/or services that you provide. It will be helpful if you indicate:

- ◆ any specialist area
- ◆ your place in the market

- ◆ any specific regulation or legislation that operates in your sector, and to which you have to conform
- ◆ what makes your products and/or services different from your competitors'

Also detail the main customers for the products and/or services that you provide.

2.3 Please provide any additional information on your organisation not covered above.

Please include here any additional information about your organisation that you think would be helpful to those considering your application. This may include any other form of recognition or status, eg preferred supplier status or a special relationship with any other organisation.

Section 3: Award information

If you are developing multiple awards simply copy and paste Section 3, repeating the exercise for each additional award.

3.1 Criteria

To be able to develop a Customised Award, the award must contain learning outcomes. These are clear explicit statements of what a candidate will be able to do on completion of the unit/award.

The learning outcomes must be formally assessed to determine whether the candidate is competent and the overall award must have a minimum of 10 hours of notional learning time. Notional learning time refers to the length of time it would take the average candidate to achieve the learning outcomes. This includes formal teaching, study time, practical activities and assessment.

If you answer **no** to questions i), ii) and/or iii) you should speak to your allocated SQA Officer to decide how you might progress the development of your Customised Award.

Further information on learning outcomes and assessment can be found in the Customised Awards *Unit Writing Guide*.

3.2 Please provide the title of the award and the component unit titles

In order to add the units and award to SQA systems, it is essential that you provide the structure in this section. Subsequently we will provide you with the relevant SQA award/unit codes. This will allow you, when appropriate, to complete your approval documentation.

3.3 Please indicate the number of units required to gain the award

For the purpose of building the award on our system, we must know how many of the units the candidate must pass to achieve it. The design and structure is entirely up to you and should be decided with your organisation's and the candidate's needs in mind.

3.4 Please provide the aims and objectives of the award

Identify the aims and objectives. This is so that we can understand the purpose and expected results of the award.

3.5 Has this award programme been delivered to learners?

If you answer 'Yes' please provide details. The following are examples of the type of information that would be of interest:

- ◆ dates of delivery
- ◆ numbers of participating learners
- ◆ how delivered — online, distance, classroom, etc
- ◆ is it currently certificated?

3.6 If not already developed, what is your estimated timescale for development?

To help us plan our workload and build your development into our work plan, it would be useful to be given an idea of your anticipated timescales.

3.7 How often do you intend to deliver the award programme?

Provide information regarding your delivery timelines, ie annually, twice yearly, monthly, etc.

3.8 How many candidates are there likely to be per award programme?

Please provide an indication of anticipated candidate numbers.

3.9 Is this development being funded internally? If no, please provide details of funding source and whether funding arrangements are in place

Please provide details of funding source or funding body.

If funding is being sourced externally, please indicate when funding is expected to be available.

3.10 Would you like your Customised Award to be credit rated on the Scottish Credit Qualifications Framework (SCQF)?

Having your award credit rated on the SCQF would demonstrate to candidates and employers the level of difficulty of the award and the volume of learning it contains. This allows comparability to other qualifications on Scotland's national framework, other frameworks within the UK and internationally.

Section 4: Certificate design

4.1 Please confirm how many signatories you require on the certificate

To allow us to progress the design of the certificate for the award, please confirm the number of signatories you require on the certificate.

As you will see from the sample in Appendix 2 of this guide, the signature of the SQA Chief Executive sits on the left below the title of the Award. The position of the SQA signature is fixed and cannot be moved. Any signatures which you wish to add will sit opposite this on the right-hand side of the certificate.

Each of the signatories must complete a JB3 form in Appendix 2. This must be completed to the criteria below.

- ◆ three sample signatures required
- ◆ use medium black ballpoint pen

- ◆ **original** signed JB3 form **must** be submitted by **post** — electronic copies are not acceptable
- ◆ do not fold form

4.2 How many logos do you require on the certificate?

Please confirm how many logos you require on the certificate. Appendix 1 shows you how the certificate will look with one logo. The SQA logo sits on the top left of the certificate and cannot be moved.

It is possible to have multiple logos on the certificate but we would not recommend more than two (in addition to the SQA logo) as this starts to have a negative effect on the look of the certificate.

For each logo, please complete a JB4 form (see Appendix 3). The actual logos must be submitted electronically (EPS, JPEG, TIFF or GIF file format) to customisedawards@sqa.org.uk or to your allocated SQA Officer.

Section 5: Customised Award submission checklist

Experience tells us that the additional sections of the CAS1 form are often omitted when it is returned. This checklist acts as a reminder to you of what is required. Failure to submit the correct documentation will result in a delay to the start of the Customised Award process.

Section 6: Declaration

The completed Form CAS1 should be signed and dated by someone with the authority to sign on behalf of the organisation (not necessarily the named contact person), with the signatory's name and designation inserted below. Electronic signatures are acceptable.

By signing the declaration, this person is declaring that the information supplied is, as far as they are aware, true and accurate and that any changes to the information will be notified to SQA's Customised Awards Service as soon as possible.

Please note that any award submitted must be the intellectual property of your organisation. By signing the declaration you are confirming this.

Point to note — if you will own the Customised Award but will not be the SQA approved centre involved in the delivery of the award, you will be required to complete and return to your SQA Officer a CAE Bank Status Enquiry Form. Submission of this form allows SQA to check and confirm the financial status of your organisation. Electronic copies of this form are not acceptable; a hard copy must be posted in.

The Award: getting started

A Customised Award can consist of a single unit or multiple units. These units can be purely mandatory units, a mixture of mandatory and optional units, or optional groupings of units. You may already have developed your award or you may be starting from scratch. You can include existing SQA National units in your Award; however, most customised awards consist of customised units that are developed by your organisation.

Customising your existing award

The SQA Officer will advise you as to whether your award is acceptable in its current format. Units must contain clear and unambiguous learning outcomes and it must be clear exactly what is required of the candidate to be able to determine a pass or a fail. Ideally this would be by providing clear performance criteria and evidence requirements (see below).

Developing a new Customised Award

When considering your award, an action plan can be prepared, addressing issues such as:

- ◆ the content and structure of the Customised Award
- ◆ how assessment and internal verification will be undertaken
- ◆ the physical and human resources needed
- ◆ training and development requirements
- ◆ identifying whether inclusion in the SCQF is relevant or important

If you are just starting to develop your award or it is still a work in progress, you may wish to use our unit template (see Appendix 1). The unit template gives a breakdown of the components that can be included in a unit. These are:

Learning outcomes which specify what the candidate will be able to do or know on completion of the unit. The main feature of an outcome is that it is written in terms of final output or achievement.

When writing an outcome, it should always be possible to preface the wording with the phrase 'The candidate will be able to...'.

Performance criteria which describe the standards required to achieve the learning outcomes. Performance criteria should always derive directly from the outcome and are the step-by-step tasks and detailed underpinning knowledge required by learners to correctly undertake duties.

Evidence requirements which specify the *kind* of evidence, and *how much* of it is required to show that the candidate is competent — this may include performance evidence and knowledge evidence.

If you require further details and help on how to write a unit, please see our *Customised Awards Unit Writing Guide*.

The Award: assessment

The primary purpose of assessment is to provide evidence as to whether a candidate has met the required learning outcomes. There is no format that Customised Awards assessments must follow but they should be:

- ◆ valid
- ◆ reliable
- ◆ practicable
- ◆ equitable and fair

If you require further information on assessment you may wish to refer to the *SQA Guide to Assessment* which is available on the SQA website at www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/2424.html. As already mentioned, there are no rules which you must follow when developing assessments for Customised Awards but the guide may help you decide on what assessment is appropriate for your award.

Some key points are summarised below.

The assessment process

There are five key stages to carrying out assessments:

- ◆ planning assessment
- ◆ collecting evidence of a candidate's competence
- ◆ making a judgement on the competence of the candidate
- ◆ recording the assessment decision
- ◆ giving feedback to the candidate

Some of these stages will occur simultaneously in the natural course of events. For example, collecting, judging and recording assessment evidence can often be completed at the same time and feedback will generally be given on an ongoing basis.

Types of assessment

Assessment can take place in a variety of settings, such as classrooms, lecture rooms, workplaces (or in a simulation of workplace conditions), community and training establishments, examination halls or online.

Workplace-based Customised Awards

No matter where it takes place or what form it takes, assessment always involves either observation, product evaluation, or questioning.

Observation

The assessor observes the candidates as they carry out tasks defined in the standards for the qualification. This observation often takes place in the workplace, or the conditions of the workplace, but it can also be carried out in a laboratory, workshop or any other place where the candidate is undertaking practical activities.

Assessors need to plan observation to take advantage of any skills or activities that occur naturally in the learning environment, and to make the best use of the available resources.

Product evaluation

In some areas, as candidates work towards achieving their qualifications they will generate evidence in the form of products of their work. This is the case in qualifications in creative areas such as art, design, craft or multimedia, as well as in many Vocational Qualifications (VQs) and other work-based or practical qualifications.

Workplace and/or classroom based Customised Awards

Questioning

Questioning is used primarily to assess cognitive ability. It can be used whenever an assessor wants to assess knowledge and understanding and the various different applications of knowledge such as reasoning, planning, analysing and evaluating. Questioning is not, though, restricted to formal external assessments. It can be used to:

- ◆ confirm knowledge and understanding
- ◆ confirm knowledge and understanding where it is not apparent from performance
- ◆ address gaps in knowledge and understanding in performance-based units
- ◆ authenticate evidence by asking learners to explain part of the evidence and/or describe the process of producing it
- ◆ assess contingencies where it would not be practical or safe to wait until the skill or activity can be observed

You can use oral or written questions, depending on the requirements of the outcomes of units being assessed and the circumstances of the assessment. Your choice of method should reflect any special assessment requirements your learners may have.

Assessment instruments

Below are **some** examples of assessment instruments.

- ◆ case studies
- ◆ dissertations
- ◆ multiple choice questions
- ◆ oral questions
- ◆ practical exercises
- ◆ projects
- ◆ self-report techniques: log books, personal interviews, questionnaires
- ◆ short answer questions
- ◆ online assessments based on any of the above

Making a judgement

The evidence has to be judged against the Performance Criteria and Evidence Requirements. Candidates should demonstrate that they have gained the required knowledge and/or skills.

Recording evidence

A straightforward system for recording assessment evidence and judgements should be used and adopted by all the assessors (if there's more than one). The recording method used should meet the needs of candidates, your company and the awarding body.

An individual assessment record should show what evidence has been produced, what decisions have been made, and where the evidence is located. It is not necessary to collect all the evidence in one place — as long as it is clearly referenced in the assessment record. Evidence should be accessible so that assessment decisions can be monitored by the internal verifier. The assessment record could be signed by the assessor whenever the candidate achieves an Outcome.

Assessors

Assessors need to be technically expert in the area they will be assessing and competent as workplace- or classroom-based assessors. They must also hold relevant qualifications or be able to demonstrate equivalent training and/or experience that is acceptable to SQA, such as through the submission of an assessor code of practice.

Details of nationally recognised assessor qualifications and the alternative code of practice are contained in our guidance: [‘Recognising assessor and verifier skills and knowledge: A guide for centres offering customised awards’](#).

The role of the assessor is to:

- ◆ ensure that the candidate is ready for assessment, identify opportunities to carry out assessments, agree an assessment plan, and set target dates with the candidate
- ◆ work with the candidate to collect evidence of competence
- ◆ assess evidence and make judgements about the candidate's competence
- ◆ record judgements, keep assessment records, and provide feedback to the candidate
- ◆ liaise with the internal verifier

The Award: internal verification and quality assurance

To be effective, a Customised Award has to satisfy all interested parties that valid, reliable measures are in place to ensure that candidates are competent. As part of your application for centre approval, you will need to demonstrate that you have appropriate internal verification processes in place. For further information please refer to SQA's [Guide to Approval](#) and [Internal Verification: A Guide for Centres offering SQA qualifications](#).

Some key points are summarised below.

Internal verification

Internal verification is a key part of maintaining the quality of the Customised Award — its primary function is to ensure that assessments are consistent. The key stages are outlined below.

Standardisation — as part of preparation for assessment, the internal verifier or verifiers should meet with assessors to agree on the assessment and recording methods to be used. Assessors should be able to agree a common interpretation of standards; techniques such as meeting to discuss sources of evidence, and developing common questions and exemplars, should help.

Monitoring — the judgements made and assessment records kept by assessors should be monitored by the internal verifier(s) to ensure that the standards are being interpreted consistently. Sampling (a quality assurance technique — see the SQA publication [Internal Verification: A Guide for Centres offering SQA qualifications](#)) should be used to confirm that assessment judgements made by **all** assessors are reviewed. If more than one internal verifier is involved, all the verifiers should meet regularly to discuss the monitoring system (and to ensure consistency of the internal verification process). Records of internal verifiers' meetings with each other and with assessors would form part of the quality assurance system for the Customised Award.

Review — an additional quality assurance step will involve ongoing monitoring and review of assessment and internal verification. This should be undertaken by internal verifiers, in conjunction with the co-ordinator, and should address issues such as:

- ◆ feedback from assessors' and internal verifiers' meetings
- ◆ feedback from external parties
- ◆ the effectiveness of the assessment and internal verification processes

Roles in quality assurance

The role of the internal verifier is to:

- ◆ help assessors to prepare for, and standardise, assessments
- ◆ observe and countersign a sample of assessments and records to monitor consistency
- ◆ support the assessors by offering guidance and advice

Internal verifiers also need to have technical expertise in the areas being assessed so they can support the assessors and ensure that standards are being maintained. Like assessors, most internal verifiers will need training in methods of internal verification and quality assurance to help them carry out their role.

Internal verifiers must hold relevant qualifications or be able to demonstrate equivalent training and/or experience that is acceptable to SQA such as through the submission of a verifier code of practice.

Details of nationally recognised verifier qualifications and the alternative code of practice are contained in our guidance: 'Recognising assessor and verifier skills and knowledge: A guide for centres offering customised awards'.

It is important that both assessors and internal verifiers have a clear understanding of their roles in the programme.

The Award: technical review

Before your company can offer a Customised Award, we will review any new Units in the award and the structure of the award. There are no set requirements for the structure and content of Customised Awards, but we will consult with experts on the technical content of the Units, and on the coherence and appropriateness of the award structure. Once the technical review has taken place you will be notified of the outcome by your SQA Officer. This review will only take place if you are not submitting the units for SCQF credit rating.

Next steps

SQA Centre and Award Approval

There are two steps to the SQA Approval process:

- ◆ approval as an SQA Centre
- ◆ approval to offer your SQA Customised Award

Unless you are already an approved SQA Centre you must apply for **both** at the same time. You will still own the Customised Award but need to demonstrate that you (or another nominated organisation) meet SQA's quality assurance criteria for delivery of the award.

An approved centre is an organisation authorised by SQA to carry out assessments to the standards required by a Customised Award.

Your Business Development Manager will support you through the process of becoming an approved centre. Although your approval application should not be submitted until the Customised Award development process is completed, you can prepare for it at the same time. Information on both processes can be found in SQA's [Guide to Approval](#), which is available on our website.

External verification

Once your organisation has been approved as an SQA centre, it will be responsible for ensuring that the assessment of candidates for the Customised Award is consistent and meets the standards. SQA's role will be to confirm that standards are being maintained and to provide an independent, external quality assurance audit.

We have a team of External Verifiers, who are subject specialists, who visit centres to review assessment and internal verification arrangements. How often these Verifiers visit you will depend on the requirements of your company and the award but it is generally on an annual basis.

Certification

Customised Award candidates will gain recognition in the form of a Scottish Qualifications Certificate (SQC). The SQC is a personal record which is automatically updated each time the holder is certificated for a qualification — so it forms a complete record of someone's achievements over his or her career.

In addition, once an employee has achieved all the Units making up the award, he or she will receive a Customised Award Certificate. This bears the SQA crest together with the name or logo of the company, a joint signature and the title of the Customised Award. A sample certificate is provided in Appendix 2.

Appendix 1

Unit template (please complete the blank boxes)

Organisation name	
Award title	
Unit title	
Unit summary and entry requirements (if applicable)	

Learning outcome 1: (What you want the candidate to do)	
Performance criteria: (How you want the candidate to do it. The number of Performance Criteria is not prescriptive – you can have fewer or more if required)	Evidence: (The amount and type of evidence. You may not need an item of evidence for each Performance Criteria)
1.1	
1.2	
1.3	

Learning outcome 2: (What you want the candidate to do)	
Performance criteria: (How you want the candidate to do it. The number of Performance Criteria is not prescriptive – you can have fewer or more if required)	Evidence: (The amount and type of evidence. You may not need an item of evidence for each Performance Criteria)
1.1	
1.2	
1.3	

Learning outcome 3: (What you want the candidate to do)	
Performance criteria: (How you want the candidate to do it. The number of Performance Criteria is not prescriptive – you can have fewer or more if required)	Evidence: (The amount and type of evidence. You may not need an item of evidence for each Performance Criteria)
1.1	
1.2	
1.3	
1.4	

Learning outcome 4: (What you want the candidate to do)	
Performance criteria: (How you want the candidate to do it. The number of Performance Criteria is not prescriptive – you can have fewer or more if required)	Evidence: (The amount and type of evidence. You may not need an item of evidence for each Performance Criteria)

1.1	
1.2	

SUPPORT NOTES: [not mandatory; insert information that may be useful to support the delivery and assessment of the unit/learning outcomes/performance criteria.]

Appendix 2

Our
Company
Logo

Your
Company
Logo

This document is issued to certify
that in April 2010

Candidate Name

attained the

Customised Award

Your Award Title

<SQA Chief Executive signature> <Your designated signature>

Chief Executive <Title of your Signatory>

Scottish Qualifications Authority <Your organisation name>