

Guidance for UK-based centres on providing SQA qualifications overseas

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Foreword

There has been a growth in the number of opportunities for UK-based centres to deliver SQA qualifications overseas — that is, outside the United Kingdom. This guide has been prepared with the help of Scottish centres with significant experience of delivering qualifications overseas. Its aim is to:

- ◆ offer advice on the development of successful international partnerships to deliver SQA qualifications
- ◆ provide support in promoting the uniqueness and excellence of Scottish education and training internationally

While the Guide has been written primarily for centres based in the UK, it should also be of interest to the partners your centre may wish to work with in delivering our qualifications. Throughout the guide, you will find practical examples of partnership working in the form of case studies based on the experience of staff from centres in Scotland.

Introduction

SQA's policy on delivering our qualifications overseas

SQA welcomes the opportunity to work with:

- ◆ overseas centres wishing to become SQA-approved centres, and
- ◆ established centres wishing to offer SQA qualifications through sites located overseas

Our principal objective is to make sure that the standard of quality assurance is applied rigorously and consistently regardless of location, so that our reputation at home and overseas is safeguarded. We will conduct quality assurance of qualifications delivered overseas when we have evidence that it is appropriate to do so — this can take place in Scotland or overseas, as

From 1 September 2004, the arrangements described in the following paragraphs will apply to the assessment and quality assurance of SQA's qualifications delivered overseas.

SQA will recognise the delivery of its qualifications through approved centres and their sites. These sites may be outside the United Kingdom. SQA-approved centres will be responsible for advising SQA of any sites overseas where learners are entered for our qualifications, or where learners are entered for our qualifications as an online arrangement and are located overseas.

SQA will continue to have a direct quality assurance relationship with SQA approved centres overseas. This policy therefore does not preclude overseas sites becoming SQA approved centres in their own right. In this respect, SQA approved centres in Scotland can provide training and consultancy services to support overseas sites through the process of becoming directly-approved SQA centres. Approval will depend on these sites meeting SQA's existing approval criteria.

The cost for all quality assurance of centres and/or sites overseas will be met by the approved centre. However, it would not be our intention to visit every site overseas, but to use a sampling strategy based on a rigorous assessment of risk to SQA's reputation overseas.

The sampling strategy will be developed on the basis of the data provided by centres on their overseas assessment activities. This data will be gathered twice a year — in April and October. Failure to provide accurate data may result in a review of the centre's existing quality assurance arrangements with SQA.

Much of the advice given in this guide is not unique to the delivery of qualifications overseas. However, working overseas brings an additional set of considerations over and above those that apply in the UK. Although technology

now makes communication at a distance and across time zones relatively easy, there is still not the same opportunity to anticipate and react to changing circumstances at a distance. When working overseas you might want to think about some of the factors identified in this guide as part of your planning and preparation.

A number of headings appear in the guide and these correspond with the headings in the SQA checklist (see Appendix 1). This checklist may be used by centres when establishing partnerships with overseas sites.

You should use this guide and the accompanying checklist as advisory documents. However, no document will be able to cover every eventuality that should be considered when working overseas. Therefore, while on the following pages there are indicators of what may need to be considered, these should not be seen as a definitive list. Likewise it would not be appropriate to limit your thinking solely to what is covered here. In every case, you should apply your own judgement on the types of additional issues that might arise when working overseas.

Models of delivery

SQA qualifications can be delivered overseas through a range of suggested delivery models:

Model 1

UK centre staff undertake all learning delivery, assessment and internal verification.

Model 2

Overseas staff undertake learning delivery; all assessment and internal verification undertaken in UK.

Model 3

Overseas staff undertake learning delivery and assessment using UK centre assessments; all internal verification undertaken by UK centre.

Model 4

Overseas staff undertake learning delivery and assessment using locally prepared assessments; all internal verification undertaken by UK centre.

There is no ideal model — the exact format a centre chooses will be based on what it believes is the best option, taking account of all the risks involved. Centres may opt for a composite of some of the features of each of the four models outlined above.

Risk assessment

We have developed a Risk Assessment template (see Appendix 2). Centres are advised to undertake a formal risk assessment process when establishing relationships to deliver SQA qualifications overseas. The template can be used both for initial assessment and as part of the on-going process of monitoring and control. We will refer to the importance of risk assessment frequently throughout this guide.

Centres should ensure that where they devolve responsibility for key aspects of delivery, assessment and quality assurance to the site, systems are in place to support this model.

Working in partnership

Many centres have found that the most successful relationships have been developed when a three-stage process has been followed. These stages are:

Background research

- ◆ carry out initial research
- ◆ carry out further research in conjunction with visit(s) overseas
- ◆ complete full risk assessment
- ◆ ensure that the Memorandum of Understanding between the parties is signed

Contract and set-up

- ◆ finalise and sign the contract
- ◆ set up the processes for achieving the contract deliverables
- ◆ support local staff through induction and training processes

Delivering and monitoring the relationship

- ◆ monitor the assessment and internal verification procedures
- ◆ maintain a process of continuous improvement

Each of these stages is discussed in detail in the following sections of this guide.

1 Background research

Initial research

Many organisations enjoying successful international trading relationships do so because of the attention to detail and level of risk analysis that were applied when they set up the relationships. Centres are advised to ensure that they are able to devote enough time and resources to this stage of the process. Centres will always be under pressure to give quick answers to the potential overseas partner and whilst speed is to be commended, attention to detail should not be compromised in the process. Centres with experience of working overseas have highlighted that:

- ◆ face-to-face discussions are helpful in building productive relationships
- ◆ time should be allowed for action and response to issues; don't be put under pressure to agree without proper research

You may identify other factors that need to be taken on board when working overseas; many of these will require investment of time and resources from your centre if a successful relationship is to be achieved. During the background research, you will want to understand how the various factors can impact on your proposed relationship.

The partner and its staff

Status of the partner within its country — is it a government department, recognised government agent or independent provider?

As with any business relationship, it is important at the outset to establish who the real decision makers are and what their status is within the organisation they represent. It can be much more difficult to establish the status of potential partners when working overseas. When conducting your research, you may find contacting the following agencies helpful:

- ◆ UK government agencies
- ◆ the British Council

You may wish to develop your site selection checklist to take on additional considerations when working overseas, for example ensuring that you understand the exact nature of the business the site is engaged in, and whether it has adequate financial resources and financial viability.

The paramount consideration, as with any business transaction, has to be the financial viability of the proposition and we shall look at this consideration in more detail on pages 8 and 9.

Staff with qualifications and/or experience in delivering the required type of assessment and the currency of that experience

As you would with your own staff, you will need to check for the relevant skills, experience and qualifications.

You should consider:

- ◆ level of competence in the subject
- ◆ experience of competence-based assessment
- ◆ rate of staff turnover
- ◆ who should be involved in site visits at the start of the project
- ◆ building relationships with the person responsible for the day-to-day quality in delivering the qualifications overseas

The level of technical competence in the subjects to be delivered needs to be established. Guidance on this is readily available through UK NARIC, the national agency under contract to the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) to provide the official source of information and advice on the comparability of international qualifications from over 180 countries worldwide with those in the UK. Its website can be accessed at: www.naric.org.uk.

Experience in delivering competence-based assessment can be variable in Scotland and overseas and additional support may be required at induction. We will return in the section on induction on pages 16 and 17 to the types of support that might be helpful.

As part of your risk assessment, you may also wish to consider the rate of staff turnover of the potential partner and the ratio of permanent to contract staff engaged in the proposed arrangement.

Case study

Background

A partnership was in the course of being established between a Scottish centre and an overseas institution.

What happened

Initially, all the overseas meetings were with the institution's Principal and its Business Development Partners. As time progressed, it became increasingly difficult to identify and hold discussion with those responsible for the quality assurance aspects of the relationship. Eventually, it became clear the Scottish centre could not be confident that all the quality assurance aspects could be addressed and they withdrew from the relationship.

The outcome

Having failed to recover costs on that abortive venture, the Scottish centre now requires whoever has day-to-day responsibility for academic quality in an overseas institution to be involved at the outset and in all its regular visits to the site. As a result it has been able to build a number of productive relationships with considerably fewer difficulties than in the past.

Lessons

Be very clear about who you want to be involved in your overseas visits from the start. Pay particular attention to building relationships with the day-to-day owner of academic quality standards overseas

Communication skills of overseas staff and learners

While SQA is committed to ensuring that our qualifications are accessible to all learners who could potentially achieve them, the main language of assessment and administration of the qualifications is still likely to be English. You may therefore wish to meet with staff, and with either prospective or existing learners, to help you to gauge their level of competence in English. From this, you will be able to identify how much additional support will be needed.

Overseas fact-finding visit

Factors to take into account during an overseas visit

Some general advice when making these visits:

- ◆ Keep up-to-date with Foreign and Commonwealth Office advice on visits to countries and issues to be aware of. Its website: **www.fco.gov.uk** is updated hourly with the latest information.
- ◆ Obtain consular advice on visas — it is not advisable to attempt to undertake business development visits on tourist visas, particularly if it is likely that the member of staff will become a regular visitor to the country as the relationship develops.
- ◆ Make sure there are adequate travel insurance arrangements including extensive medical cover in place — check very carefully if staff are using personal annual travel insurance policies for any limitations on business travel coverage; most personal policies only cover business travel for a few days each year. Ensure that staff have a separate note of the policy number and contact details.
- ◆ Advise staff travelling overseas to consider carrying a basic medical kit. Further up-to-date advice on health matters and online purchase of medical kits, including sterile items, can be obtained from: **www.masta.org** or, alternatively, staff could speak to their GP.
- ◆ Advise staff to consult with the British Council or the British High Commission Trade attaché who can provide local guidance on interpreters with sufficient technical expertise to support staff during discussions should this become necessary.
- ◆ Check out the need for vaccinations. Ask staff to complete a personal information sheet to be left with you before departure. This could include information such as passport number, next of kin etc.
- ◆ Suggest to staff taking sterling currency that English banknotes may be more acceptable than Scottish.

Availability and suitability of resources to support delivery and assessment

As you would in applying your site selection checklist in the UK, you should use this to help you to make an assessment of the adequacy of all the resources in the site, and be prepared to make recommendations on changes/additions required to support the delivery of the qualifications.

You must be satisfied that resources will be available to learners as required, to ensure that they are not disadvantaged in working towards the qualifications. It is your role to ensure that all candidates have a quality assessment experience, and that they have equal opportunity to both resources and the assessment process.

The qualifications being proposed

Given that our qualifications have been developed in the context of UK legislation, work processes and culture (an example would be an SQA Construction qualification which conforms to UK building regulations), every business proposition has to be considered on its own merits. It is up to you to undertake appropriate research at the earliest opportunity to ensure that the qualifications are appropriate for delivery overseas. However, you may wish to seek early guidance from the appropriate SQA Qualifications Manager if you have any concerns about the suitability of your proposed activity.

The business proposition

We should like to know of your plans to work overseas as soon as possible. If your centre makes an arrangement to deliver our qualifications through an overseas site, SQA is then also committed to quality assurance activity overseas and this clearly has resource implications for us. Our key requirements are to safeguard the quality of our qualifications and our reputation. Therefore, you must advise SQA of your plans to deliver overseas as early as possible, and you should also expect a systems monitoring visit before you can deliver the qualification overseas.

Guidance for new centres

In the spirit of providing helpful guidance to those new to overseas markets and given our experience and that of centres currently delivering qualifications overseas, the following factors are highlighted as being worthy of particular attention:

- ◆ financial viability of the proposition including recognition of exchange rate and delayed payment risks

If your centre is engaging in overseas activity for the first time, we suggest that you contact your bank at an early opportunity to obtain specialist help. This

support is often available free of charge. You may also wish to consider contacting your local Chamber of Commerce for guidance:

www.scottishchambers.org.uk

You may wish to consider the following:

- ◆ Familiarising yourself with any specific laws/local taxes/duties.
- ◆ As with any business activity, the risk of non-payment is one that has to be taken into account. It is therefore important that a range of credit references from independent sources is obtained.
- ◆ At the outset, it is important to be clear about the currency the transaction will be in. Transactions in sterling, US dollars or euros are not exempt from difficulties; here there are often delays in forwarding the payment back to the UK, particularly if there are local exchange control rules that limit the amount of hard currency transactions that can be undertaken from that country in any one month.
- ◆ Protecting your centre against a declining exchange rate position between signing the contract and receipt of funds if transactions are being conducted in the local currency. This can be done through the use of forward foreign exchange contracts — again something on which your centre's bank would have to provide guidance.
- ◆ Even if the transaction is to be paid in sterling from a country where there are no local exchange control rules, funds can take several weeks to arrive into the UK banking system and, if it is not specified to the contrary in the contract, overseas partners can pass all transaction charges levied to the recipient and these costs can be high.
- ◆ Some centres working overseas have taken the step of establishing separate accounts solely for the receipt of funds from overseas, to make monitoring easier and to avoid any risk to their main centre accounts of unauthorised access to the accounts by third parties.
- ◆ It has to be recognised that when your centre is working overseas, situations may change despite all your plans. You may wish to establish financial arrangements to ensure that there is full cost recovery at every stage of the project.
- ◆ Like many instances here in the UK, it is possible that learner numbers from the overseas site are not as high as originally projected. Even when the numbers are broadly equivalent to what was expected, the timescales can often be far longer than anticipated — delays of two years in achieving predicted numbers are not unheard of. The business risk assessment exercise should look carefully at the impact of reduced numbers and delayed delivery timescales when reviewing the break-even position. You may wish to consider staging payments, with as much of the total costs paid upfront as the country's legislation will allow. We also advise that the contract is written in such a way that it can be terminated immediately a payment is not forthcoming, at no penalty to your centre.

Case study

Background

A centre had embarked on a programme to support the delivery of qualifications overseas. Detailed research was undertaken and the business case was reviewed in depth to ensure that the financial projections were robust.

What happened

Just as the programme was being launched SARS broke out. Representatives from Scotland were not able to visit the overseas sites for several months.

The outcome

The programme delay meant that income was not forthcoming as projected. However, because the programme's finance had been set up to allow for delays, there was no adverse impact on the centre's finances.

Lessons

- ◆ When your centre is working overseas it has to be recognised that situations may change despite all your plans.
- ◆ Establish the financing to ensure that you have full cost recovery at every stage of the project.

The infrastructure required overseas to support the site(s)

Caution is advised when considering whether to establish an office infrastructure overseas at the outset. To avoid any difficulties should the relationship need to be terminated at short notice, and to minimise financial losses from breaking rental or employment arrangements, some centres have successfully sub-contracted premises and staff from third parties overseas on short term contracts.

Political and financial situation of the country of the partner taking account of Foreign and Commonwealth Office guidelines

It is recognised that political and financial stability can change very quickly in a country. We suggest that during the risk assessment process there is a very healthy regard for the long-term uncertainty prevalent in many areas.

Where a quality assurance visit by SQA is required under the operating model adopted by the centre, we reserve the right not to ask our Quality Assurance Managers and/or External Verifiers to visit countries that are subject to Advisory Notices. We will endeavour to make alternative arrangements to quality assure any activity that has taken place before this time. Centres should not enter any more candidates until the situation improves and the Advisory notices are rescinded. Centres will be liable for any additional costs incurred by SQA in operating an alternative quality assurance model in these circumstances.

Future development plans of the overseas partner

We suggest that at the outset the future development plans in relation to the delivery of SQA qualifications are established. In particular, does the overseas site wish to remain a satellite site, or is its ambition to become a centre in its own right — and if so, what are the timescales, milestones and development plans to achieve this?

Reminder: To aid with forward planning of overseas activities and particularly of our staff visits overseas, it would be helpful if SQA could be advised of a centre's plans as soon as it feels able to share the information.

As stated in the SQA Checklist (Appendix 1) we shall require an indication that the proposed engagement has been reviewed and endorsed by the centre's senior management team.

The Memorandum of Understanding

Centres have found it helpful to enter into a *Memorandum of Understanding* (MOU) with their overseas partners at an early stage. Although this document has no legal standing, it does indicate a statement of intent and determines the spirit of the relationship early on. This can be very helpful given that formal contracting activities can take some time to be concluded, taking into account the need for legal advisors from possibly more than one country to be involved.

Exemplar requirements from one centre's *Memorandum of Understanding*

The MOU clearly states the course being delivered, the overseas site details, the projected learner numbers and the timescales, and the formal communication channels. The SQA checklist is also attached to the MOU.

The MOU also states:

- ◆ learner entry requirement must be identical to that of the centre
- ◆ all learner detail must be sent to the centre within seven days of enrolment
- ◆ overseas site must set up a committee to co-ordinate operations
- ◆ both parties must appoint central contacts and all correspondence should be channelled through these contacts
- ◆ all teaching material must be appropriate to the Learning standards contained in the SQA course specifications
- ◆ the instruments of assessment used throughout the course will be those supplied by the centre
- ◆ learners must not be allowed to retain the instruments of assessment after completion of an assessment exercise
- ◆ all learners' assessment scripts and other evidence must be initially marked by the overseas site and then sent to the centre for internal verification prior to final approval by SQA's External Verifier
- ◆ two different instruments of assessment will be supplied by the centre for each assessment to allow learners a maximum of one opportunity to resit unsuccessful assessments
- ◆ all material provided by the centre will be treated as confidential and not distributed to any person or organisation not connected with the overseas site, or used for any purpose other than the delivery of (named course)
- ◆ learner appeals against any aspect of the assessment procedures or their implementation must be referred to the centre for consideration
- ◆ any changes that are made by SQA or the centre to the structure or content of the course must be implemented simultaneously by the centre and the overseas site
- ◆ the centre specifies its fee structure within the *Memorandum*
- ◆ any SQA external moderation visit overseas will be funded by the overseas site

2 Contract and set-up

Contract details

The following notes are for guidance only. We will not require sight of the contracts being entered into.

In preparing contracts it should be recognised that you will find it extremely difficult to rely on the contract in the event of difficulties. Although on paper there are binding agreements and commitments in place, it will be an extremely protracted and often expensive process to resort to legal systems to resolve issues. This should be borne in mind when drawing up any contract.

We suggest that your centre's legal representative prepares the contracts in English. The legal adviser should have some experience of preparing contracts for the overseas country concerned.

Parties involved should be clearly and unambiguously identified

As with all contracts, it is very important to be clear who the contract is with, and if any party other than the overseas site is a party to the contract the exact nature of the relationship should be understood and any validating checks carried out. It is important to watch for minor spelling differences in the names of the partners; these should never be assumed to be a spelling or translation error.

Roles and responsibilities of all parties involved should be clearly stated

We suggest that a prescriptive list of roles and responsibilities of all parties to the contract is stated. Timescales for activities should be included, in particular in relation to communication with your centre.

Copyright and ownership of learning and assessment materials

Whilst it is difficult to monitor adherence to copyright agreements overseas, it is still sensible to include some statements within the contract. This will at least set some ground rules and may be sufficient to deter the misuse of materials.

Release clauses

Release clauses should help to protect the position of your centre and your site in the event of a deteriorating safety and security situation overseas. You may wish to consider including a specific clause to cover this possibility and the steps that will be taken to put arrangements on hold until the situation improves.

As in any contract, should the overseas party fail to fulfil its obligations, for example in meeting the quality assurance standards of your centre, the option to terminate the relationship early should be explicitly stated in the contract.

Review

It may be helpful to have a formal period of review.

Contingency arrangements if key overseas personnel are unavailable

As with any satellite site arrangement, it is important you have a reliable key and alternative contact in the site. We suggest that contract arrangements include requirements to keep your centre updated of personnel changes, and in any event, to mitigate against the risks of over-dependence on one key contact, it is recommended that overseas sites be required to identify alternative contacts and that a relationship is also established with these staff over time. All named contacts should be known to staff within your centre and ideally, these named contacts should have gone through all the induction process to support the overseas delivery of the qualifications.

Seek early cost recovery

We have already mentioned that you should consider full cost recovery at each stage of the process. The contract should include arrangements to recover costs.

Setting up the delivery of the programmes

There are four elements to this important stage that will take place before any learners are registered for the qualifications. The exact needs of each partnership will be different and your centre will wish to tailor its start-up activities to take account of the delivery model it is operating. These could include:

- ◆ familiarising overseas staff with documents relating to the qualifications and SQA's procedures
- ◆ formally notifying SQA of the establishment of the overseas site
- ◆ reviewing procedures and materials produced by the overseas site
- ◆ induction and training of overseas site staff
- ◆ familiarisation with methods and processes of competence-based assessment
- ◆ establishing internal quality assurance procedures and monitoring sites overseas
- ◆ clarifying timescales

Familiarisation with documents relating to the qualifications and SQA's procedures

Some centres have found it easiest to give the sites access to electronic copies on their own internal websites rather than collating, updating and sending paper copies. We would suggest that overseas sites have copies of the following documents:

SQA Publications:

- ◆ *Scotland's National Qualifications — A Guide*
- ◆ *Induction Guide for Centre Staff*
- ◆ *Quality Assurance Principles, Elements and Criteria* (due for revision in 2006)
- ◆ *Guide to Assessment and Quality Assurance*
- ◆ *Guide to Approval*

Centre documents:

- ◆ *Internal Quality Assurance Procedures*
- ◆ *Internal Audit Reports*

Formal notification of the establishment of the overseas site

At this stage, if the centre has not already done so, it is essential that it contact its SQA Quality Assurance Manager to advise them that the centre is in the process of setting up an overseas site and to discuss any arrangements that need to be made that might involve SQA.

Reviewing procedures and materials produced by the overseas site

The SQA checklist in the *Guide to Approval* relating to policies should be followed. In many countries, it may not be possible to ask the overseas site to follow exactly the same policy as is used in the UK.

You may be required to exercise some judgement when determining the extent to which the UK Health and Safety and Data Protection Acts' standards apply to overseas sites.

The following points should also be considered:

Accessibility of qualifications

Over the last two years, the UK and other states of the European Union have established a **common framework**, based on a number of European directives, to tackle unfair discrimination on six grounds. These are:

- ◆ sex
- ◆ race
- ◆ disability
- ◆ sexual orientation
- ◆ religion
- ◆ age

Although there is a common framework, individual member states interpret aspects of the directives differently, resulting in changes to the detail of the equality legislation which applies in each member state. The above legislation will not apply to countries outside the European Union, but it would be helpful to research how the issues of inclusion are being addressed within the country where the site is located, and to ensure that while practices are compatible with your practices within the UK-based centre, there is an acknowledgement that cultural differences may apply.

Appeals procedures

Particular care should be taken when establishing appeals procedures to ensure that procedures and timescales set within them are realistic, taking account of the distance and time differences. For example, timescales to investigate and respond to the learner will need to be longer to allow discussions to take place with local staff. Centres should also recognise that the working week pattern of Monday to Friday does not apply in every country. The methods of raising an appeal may also have to be different; for example, submission via e-mail may have to be allowed even if normal procedures do not permit this method.

Delivery materials

If the operating model selected includes the use of locally-produced delivery or assessment materials, these items should be reviewed by staff within your centre. The level of documentation required for delivery materials (eg master files, supporting materials, subject files, specifications and lesson plans) should be the same as you would expect within your centre. Particular attention should be given to any locally-produced assessments to ensure that these are suitable for inclusion in the qualification and that the schemes of assessment are set to the same standards as expected from learners at your own centre.

Induction and training of overseas site staff

As the overseas site will not be familiar with your centre and/or SQA procedures in the same way as staff in your centre, additional time should be spent making sure that the overseas site staff fully understand all that is expected of them.

Familiarisation with methods and processes of competence-based assessment

Your centre's existing induction processes will provide a basis for the induction and professional development of staff at overseas sites. The exact content of the induction and professional development programmes will depend on the operating model selected. Centres with overseas experience have found it helpful to consider incorporating some, or all, of the following into their programmes:

- ◆ invite representatives of the overseas site to the UK for a period of time to familiarise them with the assessment process
- ◆ use a 'buddy' system between centre and site staff
- ◆ set up online support
- ◆ deliver Assessor and Verifier Units

Case study

Background

Through growing experience of working overseas, a centre began to recognise that there were a number of induction activities common to all its overseas sites.

What happened

The centre developed a standard induction programme that incorporated familiarisation with both SQA and centre procedures. This included:

- ◆ the importance of quality in education
- ◆ quality standards
- ◆ the role of SQA
- ◆ quality criteria
- ◆ application of SQA requirements to the overseas site
- ◆ the Scottish education process and its controls
- ◆ an overview of the cost of quality and the cost of failure
- ◆ good practice in student guidance
- ◆ the management of SQA courses
- ◆ how to tackle learner record keeping and ensuring learner authentication
- ◆ good practice in documenting programme delivery
- ◆ the requirements of the assessment process
- ◆ moderation — both internal and external

The outcome

By using this programme as the basis for its induction and staff development activities and tailoring each delivery of it to the audience, the centre was able to build on its experience with each new site it brought on board. The tailoring of delivery took into account the background, experience and requirements of the new site. The time spent during this set-up phase was found to be invaluable as it reduced the risk of difficulties arising once delivery of the programme began.

Lessons

Giving careful attention to the induction and development of staff at the overseas site is invaluable.

Building on a standardised model using lessons learned and customising the delivery to the audience adds value for all parties.

Establishing internal quality assurance procedures and monitoring sites overseas

Monitoring at a distance can be more challenging as it may take longer to identify where prescribed standards are not being met. Regular communication among staff is critical in establishing a successful relationship. It will allow good practices to be identified, built on and shared and will also give an early warning should potential problems be developing.

The operating model being used will influence how many additional activities will be required over and above the centre's existing procedures.

If all work is being returned to the centre for assessment, there will be few additional considerations, other than the issues of authentication covered on page 23. The more devolved the assessment activities are, the more robust the internal verification and monitoring processes must be. It will be helpful to remind overseas sites of the need to retain accurate records of meetings and communications, including those sent by e-mail; the provision of templates for meeting agendas and records might be beneficial at the outset.

Case study**Background**

A centre developed a comprehensive induction programme focusing on Quality in Education for use with any new overseas sites.

What happened

Initial reviews of assessments showed that new overseas sites were not familiar with competence-based assessments and were still assessing using a grade- or marks-based system.

The outcome

The centre developed a detailed induction programme which included an introduction to the whole process from learner entry to certification.

A review of mock learner responses based on generic Units was carried out. The responses were constructed to include a number of issues such as responses that did not cover all of the Performance Criteria and/or Range Statements. Participants all carried out the assessments and then discussed the learning points from this exercise. Sessions covering processes were held, using a question-and-answer format with prompts such as 'Tell me about your Appeals Procedure'.

Lessons

It is easy to forget that you are very familiar with competence-based assessment and the structure of the Units with Outcomes and Range Statements.

Over 90 per cent of issues that require to be addressed in the early running of a Partnership Programme relate to unfamiliarity with the setting and marking of assessments.

A structured induction programme delivered at the overseas site by UK centre staff is invaluable.

3 Delivering and monitoring the relationship

Monitoring assessment and internal verification processes

The centre is responsible for all internal quality assurance of assessment activities at the overseas site at all times. The more devolved the process is, the more likely it is that SQA will identify the site as one requiring a visit, which will be at the expense of your centre.

It is recommended that particular attention be paid to the following:

Ensuring the language of assessment is English

As mentioned previously, the language of all assessment tasks and learner responses is currently English.

The security of papers and question banks

SQA requires security in the handling and storage of question papers and National Assessment Bank materials if you are delivering National Qualifications courses. In addition, new Higher National qualifications use a graded assessment and this should be kept confidential and stored securely. It is advisable to consider replacing all assessment instruments being used in overseas sites each year. If there are cost implications of doing this, these should be factored into the business proposition at the outset.

Conduct of assessment events including the identification of appropriate independent organisations to supervise and invigilate assessments

If the centre is planning to use nationally devised assessment materials, it should follow the normal SQA procedures in relation to the overseas site. Should the centre require further guidance on this, it should contact SQA's External Assessment Team.

The supervision of assessment should be looked at closely to ensure that it will be carried out in exactly the way specified. Security of the question papers also requires to be considered. Wherever possible, assessment should be undertaken under the scrutiny of an independent agency, such as the British Council. Detailed independent checks should be undertaken by your centre where the overseas site recommends a third party other than the British Council to undertake this work.

Establishing authenticity of learner and assessment evidence

Learner authentication is the responsibility of your centre. Clearly, this is more difficult to achieve at a distance. The requirement to check officially-validated photographic identification (ie passport or national identity card) should be included in all invigilation instructions where the learners are not known to the invigilator.

Case study

Background

A centre has a successful relationship with overseas sites for the delivery of qualifications involving the delivery of workshop skills.

What happened

The centre wanted to ensure that the assessment evidence was the learners' own work.

The outcome

The centre introduced a 'spot check' programme where it asked to meet with a few learners to discuss their work with them. The learners were selected by the centre and advised to the overseas site only a few days in advance. To date, there have never been any issues in the authentication of the evidence and the visits have been warmly welcomed by all parties involved.

Lesson

Creating the situation where it is known that you will randomly verify practical activities brings a number of benefits in terms both of maintaining quality standards and also of developing partner relationships.

The use of online assessment

Centres are likely to see an increased demand for online assessment from overseas sites in the future. This is a relatively new method of assessment and all centres need to feel familiar and confident in its use before wider application across all sites. The most recent guidance available is in the publications *SQA Guidelines on Online Assessment for Further Education* and *Assessment and Quality Assurance for Open and Distance Learning*. These are available from SQA's Customer Contact Centre and SQA's website.

Some of the main issues to consider if you wish to use online assessment overseas should include:

- ◆ compatibility of the IT systems between the site and the centre
- ◆ security of assessment materials
- ◆ authentication of learners
- ◆ validity and authentication of learner evidence
- ◆ the ability to replicate assessment instruments in an online context

- ◆ storage and accessibility of learner evidence and assessments for both internal and external moderation
- ◆ removal of access to unauthorised materials
- ◆ contingency arrangements in the event of a system shutdown

We are currently developing further guidance for online delivery and assessment of qualifications.

Learner records

Centres will need to put in place methods to capture personal data relating to learners studying at overseas sites.

You should consider that:

- ◆ Names of learners need to be translated into Western alphabet formats and may be written showing the surname before the pre-name; care over accuracy of names is essential.
- ◆ It is not unusual for all learners in a group to have the same (approximate) date of birth (ie 1 January 1986 for all those thought to be born around that year). This can lead to difficulties where there is more than one learner of the same name, therefore record keeping procedures should include appropriate contingencies which might be adopted should this arise.

Any record keeping will have to conform to the UK Data Protection and Freedom of Information Acts.

Procedures for registrations, entries and results

Given the time delays in communicating information, particularly if conventional mail methods are being used, procedures for ensuring that learners are registered and entered for assessments will need to be adjusted to allow sufficient time for the information to reach your centre.

SQA will carry out quality assurance of centres' internal assessment. SQA will operate a risk-based model to determine which awards will be externally moderated and what the sampling rate will be.

Issue of certificates to learners

SQA will issue all certificates to your centre and in turn, you will be responsible for ensuring that these are forwarded to the successful overseas learners.

Maintain a process of continuous improvement

The ongoing relationship with SQA

We shall include learners from overseas sites in our normal verification processes with your centre. In addition, twice a year in March and October, we will request a return from your centre confirming a range of data which is set out in a separate document for you. This covers information such as:

- ◆ how many learners registered with the centre are based at sites overseas
- ◆ the addresses of the overseas sites
- ◆ what qualifications the learners studying at overseas sites are working towards
- ◆ the start and expected completion dates for the qualifications

We will also contact all new overseas sites to recognise their involvement in the provision of our qualifications. We shall issue a letter to each new site acknowledging its partnership with your centre in the delivery of our qualifications overseas.

All other contact in relation to the provision of the qualification and related quality assurance activities will be made through the centre contact at your centre.

The relationship with your centre

We would recommend that a visit timetable is drawn up and agreed annually with the overseas site. As has been emphasised before, regular communication is critical for success and your centre should be pro-active in ensuring that this is maintained. Where it can be achieved, involving the overseas site in the centre's virtual learning environment and encouraging on-line discussions among staff enhance the level of understanding among all the parties.

Your centre is responsible for ensuring the adequacy and effectiveness of the assessment and quality assurance processes. The decision as to the exact requirements and methods used must be taken by your centre and may vary from year to year to take account of a range of circumstances such as learner numbers, the track record of the overseas site to date, whether there has been staff turnover at the overseas site etc.

We hope that through using this Guide, you can learn from the experience of others and enjoy productive relationships with overseas sites in the delivery of our qualifications.

Appendix 1

Checklist for use by centres when establishing the delivery of SQA qualifications overseas

Centres should consider this checklist as an advisory document. It will not cover every eventuality that should be considered when working overseas, but contains some of the main points. It should not, however, be seen as a definitive list. Likewise it would not be appropriate to limit thinking solely to what is listed here. In every case, centres should apply their own judgement on the types of additional issues that might arise when working overseas, taking account of the operating model they have chosen to adopt.

1 BACKGROUND RESEARCH	
Initial research	✓
Establish the status of the overseas partner within its own country.	
Confirm overseas staff qualifications and/or experience in assessment.	
Establish the currency and relevance of overseas staff expertise.	
Establish the rate of staff turnover at the overseas site.	
Establish the ratio of permanent to contract staff at the overseas site and the contract status of the key contact.	
Establish the English language skills of overseas staff.	
Overseas fact-finding visit	
Pre-visit	
Establish current Foreign and Commonwealth Office advice re the country involved.	
Review visa, insurance and medical arrangements for staff undertaking visits.	
During the visit	
Review skills and competence of overseas staff to deliver the qualification.	
Check original certificates of overseas staff qualifications.	
Assess the availability and suitability of resources to support delivery and assessment.	
Review the likely level of English language skills of potential learners.	
Assess what further English language support might require to be offered.	
Assess the suitability of the qualifications being proposed.	
Identify the most appropriate model of delivery.	

Centre review of the business proposition	
<p>We would like to know of your plans to work overseas as soon as possible. If your centre makes an arrangement to deliver our qualifications through an overseas site, SQA is then also committed to quality assurance activity overseas and this clearly has resource implications for us. Our key requirements are to safeguard the quality assurance of our qualifications and our reputation. Therefore you must advise SQA of your plans to deliver overseas as early as possible, and you should also expect a systems monitoring visit before you can deliver the qualification overseas. SQA will recover the costs of quality assuring qualifications delivered overseas.</p> <p><i>SQA will require some indication that the proposed engagement has the endorsement of the centre's senior management team and that it has undertaken an appropriate level of risk assessment on the proposition.</i></p>	
Risk assessment	
<p>Assess the viability of the proposition taking account of risks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ failure of the overseas site to deliver to the required quality standards ◆ non-payment of fees ◆ exchange rate fluctuations ◆ delayed payment risks ◆ failure to achieve projected learner numbers ◆ protracted delivery timescales ◆ loss of key overseas personnel ◆ non-budgeted costs of additional support ◆ increase in the number and/or cost of visits to the overseas site ◆ reputational risk of any breakdown in the relationship ◆ changes in the political stability of the overseas country ◆ changes in the financial stability of the overseas country ◆ third party events impacting on the overseas country (ie health scares, difficulties in neighbouring countries) 	
<p>Future development plans of the overseas partner.</p>	

Commitment to a Memorandum of Understanding	
<p>Where a Quality Assurance visit by SQA is required under the operating model adopted by the centre, SQA reserves the right not to ask its Quality Assurance Managers and/or External Verifiers to visit countries that are subject to Advisory Notices from the Foreign Office. SQA does commit to identify what alternative arrangements, if any, can be put in place in these circumstances in order not to disadvantage existing learners, but will expect no further learners to be registered under that operating model until the situation improves.</p> <p>To aid with forward planning of overseas activities and particularly SQA staff visits overseas, it would be helpful if SQA could be advised of a centre's plans as soon as it feels able to share the information.</p>	
2 CONTRACT AND SET-UP	
Contract details	
<i>(The following notes are for guidance only. SQA will not seek sight of the contracts being entered into.)</i>	
Ensure that contracts are prepared and checked by your legal experts with knowledge of the country concerned.	
Draw up contract to ensure earliest possible cost recovery.	
Check contract to ensure that all parties are clearly and unambiguously identified.	
Check contract to confirm that the roles and responsibilities of all parties involved are clearly stated.	
Ensure that copyright and ownership of learning and assessment materials are established.	
Ensure that contract contains release clauses to cover deteriorating country risk or failure of the overseas site to comply with contractual requirements.	
Check that contract includes requirements of the overseas site to ensure adequate contingency arrangements if key personnel unavailable.	
Setting up the delivery of the programme	
Ensure that overseas site has copies of all documentation and guidelines.	
<i>If not undertaken previously, notify SQA Quality Assurance Manager to advise that centre is in the process of setting up an overseas site</i>	
Review overseas site's Equality of Access policy.	
Review UK centre's appeals procedure to confirm that it is appropriate for use by overseas-based learners.	
Review locally-produced delivery and/or assessment materials.	
Ensure that all assessors and any internal verifiers based overseas receive induction into the methods and processes of competence-based assessment.	
Ensure that internal quality assurance procedures are established for the overseas site.	

Delivering and monitoring the relationship	
Monitoring assessment and internal verification procedures	
<i>The centre is responsible for all internal quality assurance of assessment activities at the overseas sites at all times. This checklist is in addition to the centre's normal internal verification and/or quality auditing procedures.</i>	
Ensure that at all times the language of assessment is English.	
Ensure that consideration has been given to the security of assessment papers, question banks and learner responses.	
Establish procedures for the conduct and invigilation of assessment activities.	
Establish procedures to ensure authenticity of learner and assessment evidence.	
Ensure that correct procedures are being followed if online assessment is being used.	
Ensure that learner records have been prepared and formatted in an appropriate manner.	
Establish procedures to deal with missing or incomplete learner data.	
Establish procedures to ensure confidentiality of learner data at the overseas site.	
Establish procedures to ensure that registrations, entries and assessment results are forwarded to the UK centre at the correct times and in the correct manner.	
Establish procedures to handle the distribution of certificates to learners.	
Maintaining a process of continuous improvement	
<i>The centre is responsible for ensuring that all learner registrations at the overseas site are advised to SQA in twice-yearly returns of overseas engagements.</i>	
Establish overseas site visit plan for the forthcoming period.	
Establish processes for regular communication between the UK centre and the overseas site.	
Ensure that adequate and effective verification processes remain in place.	

Appendix 2: Risk assessment template

This template can be used by your centre both as part of the initial risk assessment process and also in support of the ongoing review and control of risk in a relationship. The factors suggested are for guidance. Centres will wish to include all factors that are applicable to the proposition they are reviewing. It may be that your centre will wish to use the numerical rating in this review and to weight particular factors to take account of specific situations.

Partner risk	+ve low risk	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	-ve high risk	Proposed controls
Status of the overseas partner.										
Track record of the partner in working with overseas suppliers.										
Experience of the UK centre in delivering qualifications overseas.										
Experience of the UK centre in delivering in overseas partner's country or similar.										
Other factors.										

Country risk	+ve low risk 1	2	3	4 med risk	5	6	-ve high risk 7	Proposed controls
The perceived rigour of the overseas country's own education inspection and audit regimes, and the level of inclusion of the partner in that process.								
The perceived compatibility of the overseas country's legal system with that of the UK.								
Appropriateness of the qualification to overseas delivery.								
Political stability in the overseas country or neighbouring area.								
Other factors.								

Overseas resources risks	+ve low risk 1	2	3	4 med risk	5	6	-ve high risk 7	Proposed controls
Qualifications and experience of overseas site staff.								
Extent to which English is used in the partnership arrangement.								
Suitability of the partner's facilities and resources to deliver qualification.								
Impact of loss of key personnel at the overseas site.								
Probability that suitable alternative personnel would be recruited.								
Probability that suitable independent arrangements can be made for assessment and invigilation.								
Level of confidence in the administration and record keeping systems of the overseas site.								
Other factors.								

Financial risks	+ve low risk	2	3	med risk	4	5	6	-ve high risk	7	Proposed controls
	1									
Credit rating of the overseas partner.										
Exchange rate risk of the transaction.										
Impact of local currency regulations.										
Break-even number of learners.										
Probability that the contracted number of suitable learners will be recruited.										
Probability that the break-even number of suitable learners will be recruited.										
Impact of delay in enrolment of suitable learners.										
Other factors.										

Impact	+ve low risk	2	3	med risk	4	5	6	-ve high risk	7	Proposed controls
	1									
Impact of regular overseas visits on your centre's operations.										
Ease with which overseas visits can be made.										
Ease with which overseas verification activities can be managed.										
Impact on your centre's and SQA's reputation of a breakdown in the partnership.										
Other factors.										