



# Guidance on the interpretation of SQA's Awarding Body Criteria (2007)

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## Introduction

One of the Scottish Qualifications Authority's (SQA) roles is to act as the accrediting body in Scotland — we have responsibility for accrediting Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQs), other qualifications based on approved National Occupational Standards and qualifications defined by Industry Regulatory Bodies<sup>1</sup>.

SQA accrediting body has developed and published criteria that organisations have to meet before they can become an approved awarding body (our *Awarding Body Criteria (2007)* replaced *SVQ Criteria and Guidance for Awarding Bodies (1999)* in 2007). The criteria were revised to take account of changing attitudes towards regulation, and to provide approved awarding bodies with a framework for improvement.

## How to use this guide

This guide will help awarding bodies to interpret our criteria. It has a number of aims. First, it will provide you with general guidance on the interpretation of our criteria. Second, it highlights key documents that may be requested during an SQA systems audit. Third, it provides some suggested timescales. Finally, it gives you some useful contact details and provides a glossary of terms.

You should feel free to dip into this guide as and when necessary. For example, if you are setting up a new partnership, read the paragraphs on partnership arrangements first. You may also want to refer to this publication while preparing for an SQA systems audit or while preparing your annual self-assessment report.

While we suggest that the guide in this publication is applicable to all awarding bodies, it is for your organisation to make the business decision about what applies and how. However, whatever methodology you use to manage your awarding body activities, you will need to be able to explain to our Accreditation Auditors how you meet our criteria, and provide supporting evidence.

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<sup>1</sup> In this context the term 'Regulatory Authorities' refers to independent bodies reporting to Government, such as the Security Industry Authority — not SQA, QCA, DELs or DECWL.

# 1 Leadership and management

## **Statement of excellence 1**

The awarding body has effective governance, leadership and management which support the delivery of SQA-accredited qualifications. The awarding body's strategic aims, objectives and policies are appropriate and are understood by all who refer to them.

There are three key goals that must be achieved by the awarding body to meet the statement of excellence above. These are:

1. Corporate governance: you have robust and transparent governance arrangements.
2. Leadership and management: your leadership is effective.
3. Business planning: you have an effective business planning process.

## **Corporate Governance (criteria 1.1 to 1.3.2)**

All organisations seeking to offer SQA-accredited qualifications are expected to have a robust, transparent and documented corporate governance.

### **Procedures and policies**

You are expected to have procedures and policies in place that ensures appropriate governance of your awarding body. The policies and procedures should be made available to SQA's auditors on request.

### **Governance boards**

It is likely that one or more boards will oversee your awarding body activities. Where this is the case we expect each board to have documented terms of reference. You should review these terms of reference and update them as required. We expect the terms of reference to be reviewed annually.

### **Board meetings**

Boards will normally meet on a regular basis to review and update strategy, business plans etc. You should ensure copies of agendas; minutes and other relevant paperwork are retained for your reference and for audit purposes.

### **Partnership arrangements (see also page 28)**

Awarding bodies may wish to enter into a partnership agreement with another organisation (see also page 28). If you intend to enter into such a partnership, we would ask you to inform us, once the agreement has been signed, for reference purposes.

### **Written agreements**

If you enter into a partnership agreement with another organisation (in relation to SQA-accredited qualifications) we expect the details of the partnership to be documented in a formal written agreement. The written agreement should list each partner's rights and obligations, and should be signed and dated by all parties concerned.

You are expected to retain copies of all such agreements and to send a signed copy of each one to us for reference.

### **Changes to structure or partnership agreements**

Over time, partnership agreements may change or become obsolete. You are expected to inform us of any such changes in writing immediately.

### **Managing the potential for a conflict of interest**

We acknowledge that an awarding body may have other functions, such as being a training provider — this is acceptable practice. You are expected, however, to have documented processes in place to ensure that these roles do not act as a barrier to access or result in restricted practice.

It is important that you review your awarding body functions at least once a year to ensure that there is no potential or actual conflict of interest arising as a result of multiple roles.

Such reviews should be documented and made available to SQA's auditors on request.

### **Leadership and management (criteria 2.1 to 2.5)**

Leadership of the awarding body should take responsibility for developing the strategy, objectives and supporting policies that allow the awarding body to function effectively. To be effective, the awarding body should deliver an excellent and cost-effective service to its customers.

### **Procedures and policies**

You are expected to have procedures and policies in place that assist the awarding body to ensure effective leadership. The policies and procedures should be made available to SQA's auditors on request.

### **Evidence-based decision-making**

The leadership of an awarding body will make decisions that will affect the long-term future of the organisation, its employees and, ultimately, its customers. You might use a variety of methods to analyse and compare performance (for example SWOT or PEST analysis) and so develop strategic aims, objectives and policies. Whatever method you favour, you should ensure that each decision can be justified by appropriate evidence, and that the evidence is retained for your reference and for audit purposes.

## **Strategic vision**

You may wish to develop a mission statement that sets out the awarding body's purpose and general direction, values and principles. Where a mission statement has been developed, we would expect it to be in the public domain and to be available to, and understood by, your employees.

## **Continuous improvement**

Your awarding body operates in a dynamic and continually changing environment. Your leadership should encourage a culture of continuous improvement within the awarding body. Leadership can encourage continuous improvement by a number of methods, for example customer feedback, employee suggestion schemes, etc.

## **Professional competence**

It is important that you promote a culture of continuous professional development, and that you encourage it among your employees. This means you will need to have a policy for continuing professional development, and that your employees are made aware of this policy. SQA's auditors will ask to review your continuing professional development policy. They will also wish to see evidence that members of your organisation have undertaken continuous professional development activities since the previous audit.

## **Business planning (criteria 3.1 to 3.6)**

Your awarding body needs to plan for its involvement with SQA-accredited qualifications.

## **Procedures and policies**

You are expected to have procedures and policies that ensure effective business planning for your awarding body. The policies and procedures should be made available to SQA's auditors on request.

## **Strategic aims and business objectives**

Strategic aims reflect the long-term aspirations of an organisation. It is normal for senior management to develop strategic aims. The phraseology used tends to be more open than the phraseology used to state a business objective.

It is not uncommon for a strategic aim to be given a timescale of, say, five years. Once strategic aims are defined, they are used as the basis for long term planning, programming and budgeting.

Business objectives should be clearly defined and agreed by senior management. An objective should be measurable, will normally be given a completion timescale of no more than one year, and will be allocated to an individual or business section.

You may wish to consider the use of SMART methodology when developing your business objectives to ensure that your objectives are Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time-bound.

A business objective normally states ‘what’ needs to be done. Policies state ‘how’, ‘where’ and ‘when’ — they provide the decision-making process behind the objective.

You will need to ensure that the policies you have in place support the achievement of your business objectives. You also need to ensure that your strategic aims, business objectives and supporting policies are communicated to all relevant members of your organisation.

### **Business plan**

It is possible that your awarding body is part of a larger organisation, which might mean you are told the strategic direction you are to follow rather than being allowed to develop your own. If so, it is likely that the organisation will develop a strategic plan and your awarding body will develop a business plan from this. If your awarding body falls under this model you will need to present two plans to SQA’s auditors: a corporate strategic plan and a separate awarding body business plan.

It is normal in this type of model for the business plan to be used to document the awarding body’s objectives in relation to its SQA-accredited qualifications.

In some cases the awarding body will have the self-governance to develop its own strategic and business plan. If your awarding body falls under this model you may wish to produce a single awarding body plan that contains both strategic aims (or goals) and separate objectives. However, you may if you so wish produce two separate plans.

Whatever model your awarding body falls under, we will expect to see strategic aims and supporting business objectives: the business objectives should relate to the strategic aims.

We expect a business plan to be ‘signed off’ by the Chief Executive or by your senior management board. It should be available to all those who need to make use of it.

### **Annual review**

It is the responsibility of the awarding body’s leadership to ensure that the awarding body’s objectives and supporting policies are reviewed and updated to reflect any change to the organisation’s strategic direction and aims.

You need to have a formal policy for the review of your business plan. SQA’s auditors will ask to review agendas, minutes and supporting documentation from annual review meetings.

## **Marketing strategy**

Your marketing strategy should identify your strategic aims and business objectives in relation to your SQA–accredited qualifications, in a similar fashion to your business plan. The marketing strategy may be a stand-alone document or it can be a section of your business plan.

While we do not expect you to have a separate Scottish marketing strategy we do expect you to consider in some detail your Scottish customers and markets within your marketing strategy.

Your marketing strategy will need to consider:

- ◆ the products you sell and how they affect each other
- ◆ your competitors
- ◆ your SWOT/PEST analysis
- ◆ how you promote your products to candidates and centres
- ◆ potential and actual uptake figures, and differences between these figures
- ◆ current and potential target markets
- ◆ your pricing policies
- ◆ the effectiveness of your distribution systems

By listing, considering and comparing all these factors, you should be able to develop a marketing strategy that is robust and effective.

## **Customer profile**

To aid you in the development of your marketing strategy you may wish to consider the development of a customer profile for each suite of SQA-accredited qualifications. The profile should identify who buys your products (candidates and centres etc), and why they buy your products. The customer profile can then be used to target particular groups or types of customers.

## 2 Quality enhancement

### **Statement of excellence 2**

The awarding body has developed and implemented a robust quality framework that ensures a quality product is delivered to the candidate. The awarding body and its staff are committed to a quality culture of continuous improvement through review and evaluation.

One key goal must be achieved by the awarding body to meet the statement of excellence:

1. Quality enhancement: you have a culture of continuous quality improvement.

### **Quality enhancement (criteria 4.1 to 4.3.5)**

As an SQA-approved awarding body, you are expected to have appropriate processes in place for the review of your performance, systems and procedures. The processes should be evidence-based, ie you should acquire documented evidence and use this to enhance quality.

#### **Procedures and policies**

You are expected to have procedures and policies in place to review and evaluate your performance. The procedures and policies should be designed to ensure continued quality improvement. The policies and procedures should be made available to SQA's auditors on request.

#### **Acquiring and analysing information on your performance**

It is important that you seek feedback on your performance from your stakeholders and customers: best practice would suggest this should be done once a year. You can get feedback by a number of methods, for example:

- ◆ self-assessment
- ◆ feedback gathered during and after external verification visits
- ◆ analysis of complaints and appeals
- ◆ your SWOT/PEST analysis
- ◆ analysis of your customer satisfaction surveys
- ◆ monitoring of key performance indicators

Whatever method (or combination of methods) you use, you should ensure that your analysis is documented and retained for your reference.

#### **Review of your internal systems and procedures**

Confirmation on the effectiveness (or otherwise) of your systems and procedures can be acquired by a number of methods, for example:

- ◆ internal audit
- ◆ external audit (IiP, ISO 9000, EFQM etc)
- ◆ your SWOT/PEST analysis
- ◆ self-assessment
- ◆ monitoring of any conditions issued at the time of approval or accreditation by SQA
- ◆ external verification visit reports
- ◆ complaints and appeals
- ◆ customer satisfaction surveys

Again, whatever method you use (or combination of methods) you should ensure that your analysis is documented and retained for your reference. SQA's auditors will also ask to see the reports and your analysis of the reports for audit purposes.

### **Implementing improvements as a result of analysis**

It is important that the outcomes of reviews are acted on. Where deficiency is highlighted, you should take appropriate action to rectify it. If your analysis identifies an issue with an SQA-accredited qualification, you should inform us and, where necessary, the sector skills council or the standards-setting body.

## 3 Administration and support

### Statement of excellence 3

The awarding body's administrative and support arrangements have been designed to reduce bureaucracy, are responsive to stakeholders needs, and are cost effective. The awarding body continually reviews its qualification provision to ensure it has, and deploys, sufficient resources to administer and support its qualification provision.

There are 10 key goals that must be achieved by the awarding body to meet the statement of excellence:

1. Management system: you have robust systems in place for the management of the service you offer.
2. Communication strategy: you have an effective communications strategy that supports your awarding body activities.
3. Centre approval: you have systems and procedures for the approval of centres.
4. Customer service statement: you have a customer service statement and identified service levels.
5. Complaints and appeals: you have open and transparent procedures for complaints and appeals.
6. Registration and certification: you have an effective system for the registration and certification of candidates.
7. Equal opportunities: you have implemented an equal opportunities strategy.
8. Malpractice and maladministration: you have a policy and procedure for malpractice and/or maladministration.
9. Guidance documentation: you provide clear written guidance for awarding body representatives and prospective or approved centres and their staff.
10. Record retention: you have a record retention policy that takes into account any regulatory or statutory requirements.

### Management systems (criteria 5.1 to 5.7)

Management systems should be designed to ensure the smooth running of your administrative arrangements, procedures and related policies. Your staffing levels should be sufficient to ensure that your field staff, centres and candidates are supported.

### Procedures and policies

You are expected to have documented procedures and policies in place for the effective management of your SQA-accredited qualifications. These should be made available to SQA's auditors on request.

### **Staffing and training to support the design and delivery of qualifications**

You should ensure that your management systems are designed to be responsive and cost effective. You should try and reduce bureaucracy by continually reviewing your systems and, where required, improving and streamlining them. You will need to ensure that awarding body staff have job descriptions and work instructions, and these should be readily available to them. New awarding body staff should be given induction training that covers your organisational structure, procedures and policies.

You should make copies of job descriptions and work instructions available to SQA's auditors on request.

### **Staffing levels are sufficient**

You should review staffing levels to ensure that appropriately qualified staff are allocated where they are most required. Where there is a shortfall of staff, you should consider re-deploying staff or hiring extra staff to support your SQA-accredited qualifications.

### **Staff are trained in the design and delivery of qualifications**

You will need to provide training for staff to ensure they are kept up to date with current practice and legislation. Records of this training should be retained and made available to SQA's auditors on request.

### **The awarding body deploys sufficient resources to administer and support its design and delivery of qualifications**

You should review your resource levels and, where required, re-deploy resources to ensure the effective design and delivery of qualifications.

## **Communication strategy (criteria 6.1 to 6.6)**

Effective communications are vital. The development of a communications strategy will help you to communicate with those involved — internally and externally — in the delivery of your SQA-accredited qualifications. Importantly, it will minimise the possibility of groups or individuals not being informed of important information.

### **External communications**

We expect you to have a documented communication strategy that allows you to maintain effective links with your key stakeholders, for example SQA's accrediting body, approved centres, sector skills councils, and standards-setting bodies.

### **Internal communications**

Your communication strategy should also allow for the dissemination of information to relevant awarding body staff on areas such as the awarding body's activities or the accreditation of qualifications.

## **Communications about SQA's audit activities**

You should ensure that you communicate to your employees and to your approved centres that they need to support SQA's audit activities. In particular, you may wish to inform them of the range of information that should be made available to SQA's auditors during the audit or monitoring process. Specifically, you should ensure that they are aware of their responsibilities for ensuring access to their premises and any assessment locations they have approved.

It is important that your communications strategy has been designed to ensure that you send SQA's accrediting body data on audit and certification in the agreed format and by any agreed timescales.

## **Centre approval (criteria 7.1 to 7.17)**

Centre approval is a key part of your quality assurance mechanisms. As an SQA approved awarding body, you are responsible for ensuring only those centres that have the necessary resources, systems and expertise are approved to offer your SQA-accredited qualifications.

### **Procedures and policies**

You are expected to have procedures and policies in place for the approval of centres. These should be made available to SQA's auditors on request.

### **Centre approval**

All centres wishing to deliver SQA-accredited qualifications should be approved against our Centre Approval Criteria (2005), as issued by SQA's accrediting body. You should ensure all centres seeking approval are provided with a copy of the criteria before they submit an approval application. The criteria are provided as an appendix of SQA's *Awarding Body Criteria (2007)*; you may reproduce this as required.

You may change the way the centre approval criteria is presented but if you want to make changes to the criteria or add additional criteria you should firstly seek approval, in writing, from SQA's accrediting body.

Centres' steps to approval will differ according to individual circumstances, but this is a broad model of the process:

1. Initial interest from the prospective centre.
2. Information and advice from awarding body representatives.
3. Guidance and information on meeting the criteria for approval.
4. Submission of application form.
5. Evaluation of application by the awarding body.
6. Centre visit, if applicable.
7. Notification of the outcome of the submission.

You should ensure that centres are made aware of their right to appeal against any approval decision you make.

A centre seeking approval with your awarding body should complete a formal approval application. The approval application should require the potential centre to:

- ◆ declare whether it has had a previous application for approval refused
- ◆ provide evidence that demonstrates its ability (or potential) to meet the full requirements of SQA's centre approval criteria
- ◆ give the name and contact details of the person or persons named as accountable for overall quality assurance, administration and management of the qualification
- ◆ say whether it has had approval withdrawn from another awarding body

If the centre is unable to meet SQA's approved centre criteria in full, you should specify the actions that the centre needs to take, in the form of an action plan. The action plan should be signed by the person with overall responsibility for quality assurance in the centre to show their agreement.

You should inform the centre that, while they may register candidates, they may not certificate any candidates until they have met SQA's approved centre criteria in full.

You will need to design approval guidelines and provide centres with these. The guidelines should contain, as a minimum, your:

- ◆ procedures and policies for centre approval, including your reporting systems for the outcome of the process
- ◆ approval criteria for SQA-accredited qualifications, including individual Units
- ◆ guidelines for the approval of assessment locations (may also be called 'satellite sites')
- ◆ requirements for registration, training (where applicable), assessment, verification, and certification

Where centres use more than one location or site for their SQA-accredited qualifications, all these sites should be shown to be covered by the centre's quality assurance systems and to comply with a site checklist.

You should inform the centre that it should retain copies of the site checklist and evidence that the assessment location will comply with the main centre's quality assurance systems. You should tell them that SQA's auditors will ask to see these documents during centre monitoring visits; centre monitoring visits are part of your awarding body audit.

You should retain copies of a centre's application for approval, and the associated documents. These should be made available to SQA's auditors on request.

## **Approval for new or inexperienced centres**

A centre will need your assistance from the first stage of approval, though the level of guidance you give will vary from centre to centre. The factors that determine the level of support you will give include:

- ◆ the centre's level of experience in delivering qualifications (including work-based qualifications)
- ◆ the resources available in the centre — limited resources may preclude them from being able to gain approved status on their own
- ◆ whether the centre wants, or is able, to offer full qualifications — the centre should be made aware of the option to gain approval to offer specific Units
- ◆ an experienced centre that wishes to expand an existing portfolio of qualifications

Where a centre has had no relevant experience, and is offering SQA-accredited qualifications for the first time, evidence of its ability to meet all the approval criteria may not yet be available.

In such cases, it is the potential of the centre's systems and procedures that needs to be examined and assessed. The centre should, however, provide sufficient evidence to show it has the potential to meet the full requirements of the SQA's centre approval criteria. Where there is doubt about this, you should withhold approval and offer guidance to the centre.

You should inform such centres that, while they may register candidates, they may not certificate any candidates until they have met SQA's approved centre criteria in full.

## **Approval for experienced centres**

For experienced and previously approved centres wishing to expand their portfolios, the approval process can be streamlined. Where the centre has consistently met approval criteria, certain procedures, such as management, information and recording systems, can be accepted as being in place. In this case a paper application may be sufficient.

The main focus for such applications should be on the centre's ability to comply with criteria that are specific to the SQA-accredited qualifications, or additional qualifications. You may wish to look in particular at the provision of competent Assessors and Internal Verifiers, as well as at the assessment guidance and the resources required by the qualification.

However, if you have any doubts as to the ability of a centre to meet SQA's centre approval criteria or to deliver an SQA-accredited qualification, you should carry out an approval visit.

## Approved centre register

You are expected to maintain a register of all centres approved to offer SQA-accredited qualifications. Details of the data you are required to hold on each centre within the register are listed in SQA's *Awarding Body Criteria (2007)*. You should provide access to the register for SQA's auditors on request.

## Centre partnership options

If a centre does not have the resources to achieve and maintain approved centre status, it may join up with one or more other organisations with similar objectives. Centres will need your assistance in selecting the most suitable model. Options include:

- ◆ **partnership** — a partnership between two centres each with their own distinct areas of responsibility
- ◆ **consortium** — a group of organisations working together to achieve approved status and share in the responsibility of implementing SQA-accredited qualifications
- ◆ **using external experts** — single centres hiring the services of qualified Assessors or Internal Verifiers
- ◆ **assessment locations** (may also be called 'satellite sites') — places of work providing assessment sites under the 'umbrella' of one co-ordinating centre

You should ensure that any partnership or consortium has a written agreement that specifies the name of the lead or main centre. The agreement should also clearly define which centre is responsible for:

- ◆ registering and certificating candidates
- ◆ quality assurance
- ◆ marketing
- ◆ assessment of candidates
- ◆ internal verification

## Customer service statement (criteria 8.1 to 8.7)

As an awarding body, you should have a customer-led approach to your activities. This means you should strive to include your customers (and stakeholders) in your business decisions by way of feedback surveys. It also means you need to set realistic targets for yourself, and monitor your performance against these targets.

To make your customers aware of your performance levels and your policies you should develop a customer service statement.

## Procedures and policies

You should have documented procedures and policies in place for developing and monitoring your customer service statement. These should be made available to SQA's auditors on request.

### **Availability of customer service statement**

You should ensure your customer service statement is freely available to potential and actual customers — in hard copy or via your website. This means you need to have a process for posting hard copies to those that request them. It also means that a web-based customer service statement should not be password-protected.

### **Quality of service**

You should develop and publish a customer service statement that outlines the level of service that your customers can expect you to deliver.

Your customer service statement should contain sufficient information for customers to make informed choices about your services.

### **Points of contact and communication mechanisms**

You should ensure that your customer service statement contains sufficient details (telephone numbers, web address and points of contact) to allow customers to contact you with enquiries.

### **Measurable outcomes**

Your customer service statement should contain measurable outcomes, such as timescales, associated performance measures and your customer feedback arrangements.

### **Appeals and complaints (criteria 9.1 to 9.2)**

On occasion, your approved centres or your own processes may fall short of the expectations of your customers. Where this happens, quick and effective action can mean the difference between retaining and losing a customer.

### **Availability of the complaints and appeals procedures**

You should have documented procedures and policies in place for complaints and appeals. The complaints and appeals policies should be available to all who may need to use them. They can be published as a single document or separate documents. The policies and procedures should be made available to SQA's auditors on request.

Similarly, you are expected to ensure that your approved centres develop an appeals and a complaints procedure. The appeals and complaints procedures should be evaluated and approved by your External Verifier during centre approval, re-approval and monitored thereafter to ensure they are, and remain, compatible with your own documented procedures and policies. The External Verifier should also review all appeals and complaints made to the centre to ensure that the centre is actioning them effectively and within an appropriate timescale.

Your appeals and complaints procedures, policies and logs should be made available to SQA's auditors on request. You should also inform your approved

centres that their procedures, policies and log may be reviewed by SQA's auditors during a centre monitoring visit.

### **Points of contact and communication mechanisms**

Your appeals and complaints procedures should specify relevant points of contact. They should also give sufficient details (telephone numbers, web address etc) to allow a centre or a candidate to contact you if they wish to make an appeal or a complaint.

You should also state any specific requirements for making an appeal or a complaint, eg that they must be made in writing.

### **Appeals and complaints**

Your appeals procedure should be designed to resolve any disputes arising from assessment or verification decisions, centre approval decisions and certification claims.

Your complaints procedure should specify the circumstances under which a centre or a candidate can complain to you.

Your appeals and complaints procedures should inform your candidates and centres that once the awarding body's process is exhausted, an appeal or a complaint could be progressed to SQA's accrediting body if the candidate or centre is unsatisfied. The circumstances where SQA's accrediting body may review an appeal or complaint, on behalf of a candidate or centre, are:

- ◆ the appeal or complaint should be made in connection with an SQA-accredited qualification or in connection with SQA's *Awarding Body Criteria (April 2007)*
- ◆ the appellant or complainant feels the appeal or complaint has been inadequately or unfairly investigated by the awarding body
- ◆ the awarding body was the subject of the appeal or complaint

You should ensure that the centre informs its candidates of their right to appeal or to make a complaint.

### **Response times, charges**

Your appeal and your complaint procedures should specify response times and anticipated timescales.

If you charge for making an appeal or making a complaint, you should specify the cost involved. You should also state if the charges are refundable under any circumstances.

It is important that, if you charge a candidate or centre to make an appeal or a complaint, the cost should not be a barrier.

## **Registration and certification (criteria 10.1 to 10.9)**

It is vital that all candidates are registered and certificated within timescales prescribed by the awarding body.

### **Systems and procedures**

You are expected to have documented procedures and policies for the registration and certification of candidates. These policies and procedures should be made available to SQA's auditors on request.

### **Scottish Candidate Number**

The Scottish Candidate Number is an integral part of a Scottish candidate's education record. It allows the candidates and SQA to list all of a person's lifelong educational achievements. If a qualification is not listed against a candidate's Scottish Candidate Number, it will not be recorded on their record of education. This can affect the candidate's ability to request credit transfer. As an awarding body, you are expected to make every reasonable effort to collect each candidate's Scottish Candidate Number at the point of registration, and to send the number to SQA (please see Appendix A of SQA's Awarding Body Criteria (2007) for further information).

### **If a candidate does not know his or her Scottish Candidate Number**

If, at the point of registration, the candidate does not know his or her Scottish Candidate Number, the candidate can contact SQA's Customer Contact Centre directly and ask for assistance. The Contact Centre will be able to confirm whether or not the candidate has an existing Scottish Candidate Number allocated to them. If no Scottish Candidate Number has been allocated, you should send in candidate details as usual on the templates provided, with the field for the Scottish Candidate Number merely left blank. A Scottish Candidate Number will be automatically generated for the candidate by the Accreditation Unit's in-house system.

Customer Contact Centre:

tel: 0845 279 1000

fax: 0141-242 2244

e-mail: [customer@sqa.org.uk](mailto:customer@sqa.org.uk)

Or see our website: [www.sqa.org.uk](http://www.sqa.org.uk)

Centres approved by and delivering only SQA (awarding body) qualifications have direct access to this information, so do not need to contact the help desk.

### **Registration of candidates**

You should ensure that your candidates are registered with you by your approved centres as soon as is possible. In any event, we expect candidates to be registered with the awarding body before starting assessment at the centre.

## Qualification accreditation dates

Each qualification has three dates that affect the awarding body's ability to register and certificate candidates:

- ◆ **Accreditation date** — the date the qualification goes live on SQA's system. No candidates can be registered or certificated before this date. No candidates can be registered or certificated before SQA receives the signed accreditation contract from the awarding body.
- ◆ **Lapsing date** — the date a qualification reaches the end of its accreditation period, after which an awarding body should not register any further candidates. In **exceptional** circumstances, candidates may be registered after the lapsing date. If you wish to do so, you should contact the Accreditation Unit Manager in writing and seek permission.
- ◆ **Finish date** (expiry) — no candidates may be registered or certificated after this date.

The accreditation and lapsing dates for Scottish Vocational Qualifications are determined by SQA's Accreditation Committee. For an SVQ level 1 and 2, the finish date is two years after the lapsing date. For an SVQ level 3 the finish date is three years after the lapsing date, and for SVQs at level 4 and 5, the finish date is four years after the lapsing date. For all other qualifications the lapsing period will generally be in alignment with these dates but for those qualifications which are required by an industry regulatory body then the lapsing period may be determined by that body.

## Common Units

Candidates may have achieved Units from a qualification with another awarding body before registering with you. If this is the case, you are expected to recognise such Units and, where appropriate, count them towards the achievement of the candidate's qualification.

## Accreditation of prior learning and achievement

Candidates should be offered, where applicable, the opportunity for the recognition of prior learning and achievement. This means you will need to have a mechanism that allows the candidate to request accreditation of prior learning and achievement.

It is the candidate's responsibility to provide you with sufficient evidence of prior learning and achievement that can be mapped against the qualification. You are responsible for carrying out the mapping exercise and coming to a decision on the relevance of the evidence. If the evidence is relevant, it should be counted towards the qualification.

You should keep a record of all such requests and decisions, and make it available to SQA's auditors on request.

## **Certification of candidates**

You are expected to ensure that candidates who complete the requirements for a qualification or Unit receive a certificate in the format that was agreed at the time of accreditation, and that it happens within your specified timescales. You should ensure that candidates who do not complete a full qualification are offered a certificate for those Units they have completed.

Your procedures for certification should be designed to ensure that a certificate can only be issued when all the requirements of the qualification, or Unit, have been met, and the claim has been authenticated. For the claim to be authenticated you need to have sufficient safeguards in place to protect against fraudulent, invalid or mistaken claims for certification.

## **Replacement certificates**

You are expected to have a process in place for issuing replacement certificates. The process should ensure that replacement certificates are clearly marked as such. Candidates and centres will need to be able to find out about your process.

If you charge for a replacement certificate you should specify the cost involved and state any exceptions. We would not, for example, expect you to charge the candidate if the replacement certificate was required due to an awarding body error.

## **Scottish Qualifications Certificate (SQC)**

The Scottish Qualifications Certificate (SQC) is the candidate's life-long learning record of all qualifications they receive. It covers all SQA-awarded or SVQs accredited by SQA that have been resulted. SQCs are generated whenever a candidate's record of achievement is updated with respect to a Group Award.

Whenever an awarding body notifies SQA's accrediting body of any SVQ certifications, we will amend the candidate record on our database, and a new SQC will be generated. A copy of the SQC will then be sent to the candidate's contact address. The SQC also gives the candidate information about the Scottish Credit and Qualification Framework (SCQF) levels for each qualification or Unit they have achieved.

## **10-week rule (applicable to SVQs, Workplace Core Skill Units and Assessor/Verifier Units only)**

If you are accredited for SVQs, Workplace Core Skill Units or the Assessor/Verifier Units, you will need a process that takes into account the 10-week rule. Your process will need to ensure that candidates seeking certification for a full SVQ, a Workplace Core Skill Unit or the Assessor/Verifier Units are registered for at least 10 weeks with the awarding body before a claim for certification is made.

If you suspect that a centre is trying to circumvent the 10-week rule, by certificating a candidate for a full SVQ Unit by Unit, then you should apply the 10-week rule to that candidate's Group Award.

If a centre has breached the 10-week rule, we expect you to carry out an investigation into the circumstances behind the breach. If your investigation proves malpractice or maladministration, you should take appropriate action. You should keep records of all breaches and any follow up investigations. The outcome of the investigation should be documented and made available to SQA's auditors on request.

### **Security of blank certificates**

You should ensure that blank certificates are accounted for and stored securely.

### **Diversity and equality (criteria 11.1 to 11.8.4)**

SQA-accredited qualifications are to be made available to all those who are able to achieve the required standard, by whatever means. They must be free from barriers that restrict access and progression.

#### **Strategy, procedures and policies**

You should have a strategy for diversity and equality that is supported by relevant procedures and policies on equal opportunities, special assessment arrangements and reasonable adjustments. The strategy, policies and procedures should be made available to SQA's auditors on request.

Your diversity and equality strategy, related policies and procedures should comply with all current legislation.

#### **Diversity and equality**

Your diversity and equality strategy should state your commitment to ensuring that all people who deal with your organisation will be treated in a fair and non-discriminatory manner. It should state how you intend to implement and monitor the strategy.

Finally, it should broadly define your policies for equal opportunities, special assessment arrangements, and reasonable adjustments.

#### **Training for staff**

It is important that you ensure that relevant members of your staff are given training on your organisation's diversity and equality strategy, policies and procedures. We suggest that this training includes, amongst other areas, current legislation, how to implement your strategy, procedures and policies, and how to avoid reinforcing stereotypes.

#### **Equal opportunities policies**

We expect your policies for equal opportunities to be freely available to all who may need to make use of it.

The policies should explain the process to follow if a person feels discriminated against, for any reason. The policies should also state the action that will be taken by your organisation in the event of an equal opportunities issue being reported to it.

### **Special assessment arrangements policies**

We expect your policies for special arrangements to be freely available to all who may need to make use of it. The policies should explain the procedure that centres should follow to apply for special assessment arrangements.

It is important that candidates who have been taken ill at short notice are given fair access to assessment.

### **Reasonable adjustments policies**

Your policy on reasonable adjustments should be freely available to all who may need to make use of it. The policies should explain the procedure that centres should follow when applying for reasonable adjustments on behalf of a candidate.

Any adjustments authorised by you should take into consideration the current needs of the candidate, and should not give the candidate an unfair advantage over other candidates. You should ensure that the qualification's assessment specifications are not invalidated.

## **Malpractice and maladministration (criteria 12.1 to 12.8)**

### **Systems and procedures**

You are expected to have documented procedures and policies for dealing with cases, or suspected cases, of malpractice and maladministration. The policies and procedures should be made available to SQA's auditors on request.

Your policies should set out the actions to be taken by the centre and/or the awarding body where cases of malpractice and/or maladministration are suspected.

### **Investigations**

We expect you to investigate any case of actual or suspected malpractice and/or maladministration. The investigation and its outcome should be fully documented.

It is important that those awarding body personnel selected to carry out an investigation are independent of normal working relationships with the centre. Where whistleblowers are involved, you should ensure you know of and apply current legislation — the legislation is designed to protect the whistleblower. The identity of whistleblowers should be protected to ensure their safety.

In certain circumstances SQA's accrediting body may take over the conduct of a malpractice and/or maladministration investigation. In such circumstances SQA's accrediting body will inform you in writing of this and the reason for taking such action.

### **Communication of information**

You should ensure that your approved centres are aware of the need to inform you immediately of any cases of, suspected or actual, malpractice and/or maladministration.

We expect you to inform SQA's accrediting body, in writing, of the name of any centre under investigation and the nature of the allegation being made against it.

You should make your centre aware that, at the end of any investigation, a report will be written and SQA's accrediting body will receive a copy of it.

You should maintain a register of all allegations of malpractice and make the register available to SQA's accrediting body on request.

Finally, you may also wish to read the four nations guidance document *Dealing with significant cases of suspected malpractice by those involved in the delivery of qualifications — Guidance for Awarding Bodies* (May 2006), which is available in the accreditation section on SQA's website.

## **Guidance documentation (criteria 13.1 to 13.5)**

### **Procedures and policies**

You are expected to have documented procedures and policies for the development, updating and distribution of guidance documents. The policies and procedures should be made available to SQA's auditors on request.

Your procedures should ensure that your staff and approved centres have access to, and use, the most up-to-date version of your guidance.

You will need to develop and keep updated a variety of guidance documents. The documents should be written in plain English. They should contain sufficient detail to allow staff and approved centres to meet your requirements, and those of SQA's accrediting body, relevant sector skills councils and standards-setting body.

## **Record retention (criteria 14.1 to 14.4)**

### **Procedure and policy**

You are expected to have a documented procedure and policy for the retention of records. The policy and procedure should be made available to SQA's auditors on request. You should ensure that your approved centres are made aware of your policy and that they adhere to it.

You should tell your approved centres how long different types of records are to be retained, and how they should be destroyed.

You should ensure your procedure and policy takes into account current legislation in regards to data protection and freedom of information (Scottish and English legislation).

### **Candidate records**

You and your approved centres should ensure that sufficient details are held on each candidate to allow them to be identified and cross-referenced to the qualifications they are registered and certificated for.

### **Referencing SQA-accredited qualifications**

You should always use the identification code and qualification title supplied by SQA's accrediting body to identify a qualification accredited by SQA.

### **Assessment and verification records**

You will need to ensure that your approved centres retain sufficient assessment and verification records for each candidate to allow for the review of assessment over time.

### **Security of candidate records**

All records that relate to candidates' personal details should be password-protected if held electronically, or kept under lock and key if held on a paper based system.

## 4 Qualification development and design

### Statement of excellence 4

The awarding body has demonstrated that it has the appropriate experience and ability to design, develop and deliver qualifications. The awarding body's assessment guidance is rigorous but has sufficient flexibility to ensure that their requirements can be met cost-effectively and in a variety of different circumstances. Copies of the awarding body's assessment methodology and guidance are made available to all those who may wish to use them.

There are four key goals that must be achieved by the awarding body to meet the statement of excellence above:

1. **Qualification structure** — the qualification and associated structure has been designed to ensure it is appropriate and meets the needs of the occupational sector.
2. **Assessment methodology** — the awarding body has designed an assessment methodology that is fit for purpose.
3. **Submissions** — the awarding body submits timely and detailed qualification submissions.
4. **Assessment guidance** — the awarding body's assessment guidance produces results that are authentic, reliable and consistent.

### Qualification structure (criteria 15.1 to 15.5)

SQA's accrediting body has divided industry into different sectors for ease of administration. Each sector has a dedicated Accreditation Adviser allocated to it. If you decide to develop a qualification and seek its accreditation by SQA the Accreditation Adviser will be available to offer you guidance and advice.

Details of the Accreditation Adviser allocated to each section of industry can be found in SQA's *SVQ Update*. This document is available in hard copy or electronically from SQA's Accreditation website.

### Procedures and policies

You are expected to have procedures and policies in place for the development and design of qualifications. The policies and procedures should be made available to SQA's auditors on request.

### National Occupational Standards

If you want your qualifications accredited by SQA's accrediting body they should be based on National Occupational Standards, which were defined by a recognised sector skills council or standards-setting body. The United Kingdom Co-ordination Group (UKCG) should have previously approved the National Occupational Standards.

## **Qualifications for regulatory purposes**

If you are designing a qualification for regulatory purposes you should ensure it meets the specification laid down by the appropriate regulatory authority.

### **Consultation**

It is important that you confirm the need for a qualification before designing it — if there is no need for a qualification, SQA's accrediting body is unlikely to accredit it for use in Scotland.

We would suggest that you carry out a consultation exercise within Scotland and seek support from Scottish industry for your proposed qualification. You should provide evidence of support from employers for your qualification submission. Lastly, you should get support for your qualification from the relevant sector skills council(s) for those qualifications based on National Occupational Standards. Where the qualification is specified by an industry regulatory body then you should seek support for your qualification from the relevant body.

SQA's accrediting body will want to see evidence of this before accrediting any qualification for use in Scotland.

### **Qualification design**

Your SQA-accredited qualifications should not be considered as 'stand alone' qualifications. You should take into consideration the overall strategy for the occupational sector and how your proposed qualification will contribute to that strategy.

You should design the qualification with progression in mind. We would suggest you consider how the candidate will progress onto other similar qualifications and to other relevant qualifications in Scotland. You should also review the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework website during the design phase. This will provide you with valuable information.

SQA's accrediting body will expect to see evidence of progression routes when the qualification is submitted for accreditation.

Your SQA-accredited qualifications should be written in the form of Units and learning Outcomes.

### **Certificate design**

The design and content of each certificate is to be approved by SQA's accrediting body at the time of accreditation. If the design or content changes for any reason you should inform SQA's accrediting body. You should also send a copy of the proposed new certificate to SQA's accrediting body for approval prior to issuing it to any candidate. The certificate should make reference to SQA as the accrediting body.

## **Assessment methodology (criteria 16.1 to 16.3.7)**

Each qualification should have an assessment methodology. This should set out appropriate methods of assessment, internal verification and external verification to ensure the integrity of the qualification.

### **Procedures and policies**

You are expected to have procedures and policies in place for the development of assessment methodologies. The policies and procedures should be made available to SQA's auditors on request.

### **Assessment methodology**

#### **SVQs only**

You should design an assessment methodology that is appropriate to each qualification or Unit. It should be based on the sector skills council's or standards-setting body's assessment strategy.

You will need to ensure the sector skills council or the standards-setting body who devised the assessment strategy provides you with a written statement that confirms that your assessment methodology meets their general principles of assessment.

#### **Non-SVQ qualifications**

If you are designing a non-SVQ qualification, you should consult with the sector skills council or the standards-setting body on which the qualification is based to establish their requirements.

You will need to ensure the sector skills council or the standards-setting body provides you with a written statement that confirms that your assessment methodology meets their general principles of assessment.

### **Assessment guidance**

Your assessment methodology should be detailed in an assessment guidance document.

A copy of your assessment guidance document should be submitted to SQA's accrediting body when you seek accreditation for the qualification.

If the final version of your assessment guidance document is not yet available, you should submit a final draft copy of the document to us. You will need to give a firm date when the final version will be available, and this date will form an accreditation condition that will be placed on your awarding body. The accreditation condition will only be lifted once we have received the final version.

## Assessment in languages other than English

You can carry out assessment in languages other than English, providing that you have gained agreement from the relevant sector skills council(s), standards-setting body(s) or regulatory authority to determine which critical aspects of the National Occupational Standards are to be assessed in English to ensure competent performance.

You should also seek permission from SQA's accrediting body prior to providing assessment in a foreign language.

You will need to ensure you have and deploy enough staff and/or associates who are competent in the language used for assessment. Similarly, you need to ensure your approved centres and their assessment locations have enough staff and/or associates who are proficient in the language used.

It is important that you ensure that assessment and verification practices are precisely equivalent to that offered in English. Finally, you should provide candidates with guidance and assessment materials that have been translated into the appropriate language.

## Submission (criteria 17.1 to 17.5)

To submit a qualification or Unit to SQA's accrediting body for accreditation, you need to be an SQA approved awarding body.

### Procedures and policies

You are expected to have procedures and policies in place to ensure submissions meet the requirements of SQA's accrediting body. The policies and procedures should be made available to SQA's auditors on request.

### Types of submissions

You can seek:

- ◆ **Awarding body approval** — required where your awarding body is not recognised by SQA's accrediting body as a provider. You must have this before you can seek accreditation for a qualification.
- ◆ **Accreditation** — required where the awarding body wishes to submit a proposal for a new qualification.
- ◆ **Re-accreditation** — required where the awarding body wishes to submit a proposal for a new qualification which will directly replace an existing qualification.
- ◆ **Extension** — required where the awarding body wishes to extend or continue provision of an existing qualification in one of the following situations:
  - the existing NOS are being revised
  - revision is pending
  - a period of continued provision is required while an awarding body is considering whether or not they still wish to offer the qualification

- ◆ **Amendment** — required in each of the following situations:
  - There has been a change to a Unit, or a number of Units, held within the structure of an existing qualification, regardless of whether mandatory or optional Units have been changed (ie where the qualification, or the mandatory section of the qualification, has not been updated in its entirety).
  - There has been a change to the assessment strategy.
  - There has been a change to the awarding partnership or awarding arrangements.
  - Additional contexts/pathways have been added to award structures.
- ◆ **Re-instatement** — required where a qualification has been withdrawn within the last six months, and the awarding body now wishes to have that qualification re-instated. Beyond this six month period, an awarding body will be required to submit an accreditation submission for the qualification in question.
- ◆ **Withdrawal** — required where the awarding body has decided that they no longer wish to offer the qualification in question. (This may possibly be due to low or zero uptake.)

Whatever type of submission you are making, you should ensure you use the appropriate SQA form — they are all available from SQA’s Accreditation website. Each form has accompanying guidance; further guidance may be sought from SQA’s accrediting body if required.

When you wish to withdraw an SQA-accredited qualification you should agree a timescale for withdrawal that will allow, where appropriate, alternative arrangements to be made for registered candidates. You should ensure that adequate notice of withdrawal is given to centres so that the interests of candidates are protected.

### **Partnership arrangements**

Awarding bodies may wish to enter into a partnership agreement with another organisation (see also page 2). If you intend to enter into such a partnership we would ask you to inform SQA’s accrediting body once the agreement has been signed for reference purposes.

### **Written agreements**

If you enter into a partnership agreement with another organisation, in relation to SQA-accredited qualifications, we expect the details of the partnership to be documented in a formal written agreement. The written agreement should list each partner’s rights and obligations and should be signed and dated by all parties concerned.

You are expected to retain copies of all such agreements and to send a signed copy of each one to SQA’s accrediting body, once the agreement has been signed, for reference purposes.

## **Changes to structure or partnership agreements**

Over time, partnership agreements may change or become obsolete. You are expected to inform SQA's accrediting body of any such changes in writing immediately.

## **Assessment guidance (criteria 18.1 to 18.10)**

You will need to develop an assessment methodology for each of your SQA-accredited qualifications or suites of qualifications. We expect you to make your centres, candidates and employees aware of your methodology. It is normal practice for awarding bodies to do this by use of assessment guidance documents.

Copies of your assessment guidance for candidates, centres and employees should be submitted to SQA's accrediting body along with your accreditation submission.

## **Procedures and policies**

You are expected to have procedures and policies in place for developing assessment guidance for the qualifications you seek to have accredited. The policies and procedures should be made available to SQA's auditors on request.

## **Assessment guidance**

We do not wish to be too prescriptive on the format and content of your assessment guidance. However, we would expect it to cover:

- ◆ independent assessment
- ◆ expertise of trainers, Assessors and Verifiers
- ◆ the extent to which simulated working conditions may be used to assess competence
- ◆ what constitutes a 'realistic working environment' (where appropriate)
- ◆ which aspects of the qualification should be assessed through performance in the workplace
- ◆ how knowledge and understanding, skills and Outcomes are to be assessed
- ◆ the amount and type of evidence to be collected

## 5 Training, assessment and verification

### Statement of excellence 5

The awarding body's methodology for verification is rigorous and has been designed to ensure that only those candidates who have shown competence are awarded a certificate. The awarding body only deploys personnel who are qualified and competent.

There are three key goals that must be achieved by the awarding body to meet this statement of excellence:

1. **Assessment and internal verification** — you ensure your approved centres have access to appropriately qualified personnel for the range of qualifications they are approved to deliver.
2. **External Verifier appointment, training, registration, deployment** — your systems and procedures for the appointment, training, registration, deployment and monitoring of External Verifiers are effective and robust.
3. **External verification visits** — you have systems and procedures for monitoring the quality and consistency of assessment provided at any location. These systems must ensure that assessment is uniformly systematic, valid, and to the defined standard.

### Training, assessment and internal verification (criteria 19.1 to 19.7)

Depending on the type of qualification you award, you are expected to ensure that each of your approved centres have sufficient competent and qualified Trainers, Assessors and Internal Verifiers for the range of qualifications they are approved to offer. You should ensure you take account of the number of registered candidates, and the approximate geographical spread of the candidates at the centre.

#### Procedures and policies

You are expected to have procedures and policies in place to ensure the quality of training, assessment and internal verification at your approved centres. The policies and procedures should be made available to SQA's auditors on request.

#### Trainers, Assessor and Internal Verifier competence

You are expected to ensure that all Trainers, Assessors and Internal Verifiers (including any peripatetic Trainers, Assessors and Internal Verifiers) employed by your approved centres and their assessment locations are occupationally competent and that they hold, or are working towards, qualifications that demonstrate their competence.

Where a Trainer, Assessor or Internal Verifier has not achieved the relevant qualification, you should ensure that the centre has a documented plan for achievement. Your External Verifier should review this plan regularly, and record the outcomes in the external verification visit report.

SQA's accrediting body does not wish to be over prescriptive on the time you allow for the achievement of a Trainer's, Assessor's and Internal Verifier's qualification. However, we expect you to take appropriate action where it appears a Trainer, Assessor or Internal Verifier is not working towards achievement within an acceptable timescale (we would suggest 24 months).

### **Assessor and Internal Verifier competence (SVQs only)**

We do not expect you to keep copies of every Assessor or Internal Verifier certificate, Curriculum Assessment guidance document, etc on your premises. Your External Verifier should check these documents during centre approval or external verification visits to the centre. You should ensure the centre retains copies of these documents for inspection — SQA's auditors will wish to review them when carrying out centre monitoring visits as part of your awarding body audit.

If a centre does not have access to a qualified Internal Verifier, you need to inform the centre that it cannot certificate candidates. Only centres with access to a qualified Internal Verifier may certificate candidates.

It is acceptable for an Assessor to act as an Internal Verifier and an Internal Verifier to act as an Assessor, if qualified. It is not acceptable for an Internal Verifier to verify evidence that he or she has assessed or countersigned as an Assessor.

### **Equivalent qualifications for Assessor and Internal Verifiers (SVQs only)**

SQA's accrediting body allows Assessors and Internal Verifiers who hold equivalent qualifications (See Appendix C of *SQA's Awarding Body Guidance (2007)*) to carry out assessment and verification. However, it is important that you always seek written approval from SQA's accrediting body before you allow Assessors and/or Internal Verifiers who hold qualifications not listed in Appendix C to carry out assessment and/or internal verification.

You may have your own brand qualifications that you believe are equivalent to the Assessor and Verifier qualifications. If so, you can submit them to SQA's accrediting body for approval. You will need to send us the full qualification specification. SQA's accrediting body's officer group, the Accreditation Centre Co-ordination Group (ACG), would then review this and if it believes they are equivalent, will allow you to use these qualifications in place of the Assessor and Verifier qualifications.

### **Trainers (non-SVQs)**

We expect you to ensure that Trainers are suitably qualified and are occupationally competent for the areas they train in. You should ensure that copies of any relevant certificates, curriculum vitae etc are retained by the awarding body. SQA's auditors will wish to review these documents as part of your awarding body audit.

## **Standardisation**

You need to ensure that Trainers, Assessors and Internal Verifiers (including any peripatetic Assessors and Internal Verifiers) know of, and implement, your requirements for the recording of training, assessment and/or verification decisions.

You should ensure that Trainers, Assessors and Internal Verifiers attend regular standardisation meetings. Standardisation meetings can be run by you or by the centre.

## **External Verifier (Moderator) appointment, training, registration, deployment (criteria 20.1 to 20.8)**

Your awarding body is accountable for the quality assurance of qualifications you have sought SQA accreditation for.

It is your responsibility to ensure that your approved centres are monitored to ensure that the appropriate standards of quality are being met. It is normal for the External Verifier (some awarding bodies refer to them as the 'External Moderator', but this is essentially the same thing) to carry out this task.

A few awarding bodies employ Systems Verifiers to assist the External Verifier carry out some of his or her tasks. The Systems Verifier will normally review quality assurance at the approved centre while the External Verifier reviews the qualification. Basically, the External Verifier will be occupationally competent in the qualifications verified, while the Systems Verifier will be competent in the awarding body's systems and procedures. This framework allows awarding bodies greater flexibility in the range of awards they can offer.

## **Procedures and policies**

You are expected to have procedures and policies in place for the appointment, training, registration, and deployment of External Verifiers. The policies and procedures should be made available to SQA's auditors on request.

## **Appointment**

You should ensure that the External Verifiers you appoint are occupationally competent and have appropriate expertise for the qualifications they are to verify. The sector skills councils, standards-setting bodies or regulatory authorities will have defined any specific requirements for External Verifier competence for their occupational sectors. You should adhere to these requirements.

To help you to make this decision, you should have developed a job specification for your External Verifiers. You may also have developed work instructions to support the External Verifier job description.

You should ensure that your External Verifiers hold, or are working towards, the appropriate verifier qualification.

If they are working towards the qualification, there should be a documented plan for achievement in the External Verifier's personnel file. The plan should be reviewed on a regular basis and appropriate action taken where it appears an External Verifier may not be working towards achievement within an acceptable timescale (we would suggest 24 months).

## **Training**

You should ensure your External Verifiers receive induction training on appointment. Induction training should include training on:

- ◆ the skills necessary to carry out external verification visits to centres
- ◆ your quality assurance systems
- ◆ standardisation activities

Once they are appointed, you should ensure your External Verifiers are given the opportunity for continuing professional development. Each External Verifier should have a continuing professional development record maintained.

To enhance your External Verifiers performance you should develop an External Verifier handbook. We would suggest this should be issued to all External Verifiers at the start of their induction training.

## **Registration and deployment**

You are responsible for keeping and maintaining a register of your External Verifiers.

The register should include a record of their qualifications, the names of centres they have been allocated, and a list of the visits (with dates) each Verifier has carried out.

## **Personnel files**

Each External Verifier should have a personnel file; the file can be paper based, electronic or a mixture of both. The file should contain:

- ◆ continuing professional development record
- ◆ curriculum vitae
- ◆ copies of certificates of competence
- ◆ copies of annual appraisals
- ◆ copy of signed code of conduct
- ◆ up-to-date correspondence

It is your responsibility to ensure the file is maintained and updated. The personnel files should be made available to SQA's auditors on request.

## **External verification visits (criteria 21.1 to 21.11)**

External verification visits to your approved centres are an integral component of your quality assurance mechanisms. They allow you to check a centre's internal quality assurance processes, monitor consistency of assessment, and ensure that centre staff are assessing to the appropriate standards for the qualification.

### **Procedures and policies**

You are expected to have procedures and policies in place to ensure centres receive regular external verification visits. The procedures and policies should ensure that external verification visit reports are compiled and evaluated, and that appropriate action is taken on the outcome of the evaluation. The policies and procedures should be made available to SQA's auditors on request.

### **Number of external verification visits**

SQA's accrediting body does not specify the number of external verification visits you should make to an approved centre each year — this is for you to decide. We do, however, require you to visit each new centre before allowing it to certificate its first candidate. This is to allow you sufficient time to check all aspects of assessment in operation.

The frequency and number of visits, after this, depends upon a number of variables, including:

- ◆ your policies on the number of visits needed for each qualification
- ◆ your analysis of the centre's internal verification and assessment systems
- ◆ the centre's experience in delivering qualifications
- ◆ the size, geographical spread, and number of assessment locations approved by the centre
- ◆ previous history of the centre
- ◆ number of registered and certificated candidates

Where a centre has no registered candidates, you may wish to reduce the number of external verification visits. Where this is the case, a note to this effect should be placed into the centre's file.

### **Pre-external verification visit activity**

Before the external verification visit, you should ensure the External Verifier is supplied with sufficient information to develop a verification-sampling plan.

You should ensure that the External Verifier contacts the centre before the visit, and informs the Centre Co-ordinator of the qualifications and Units to be verified, and the names of any assessor and internal verifier required for interview. The Centre Co-ordinator should be made aware that the list of Assessors and Internal Verifiers required for interview might be extended during the course of the visit.

It is good practice to follow up any telephone conversation with written confirmation of what was agreed between the External Verifier and the Centre Co-ordinator for the visit.

### **External verification visit reports**

At the end of each external verification visit, your External Verifier needs to give the Centre Co-ordinator verbal feedback followed by a written report. Copies of the written report should be sent to the Centre Co-ordinator, and you should keep a copy in the centre's file. Copies of the external verification visit reports should be made available to SQA's auditors on request.

The external verification visit report should be designed to highlight areas of weakness and to identify areas of good practice.

The format of the report is your responsibility. However, we expect the report to list:

- ◆ the date the visit took place, and time on site in hours
- ◆ the names of candidates, Assessor and Internal Verifiers interviewed
- ◆ the qualifications and Units verified
- ◆ the number of certificated candidates for each qualification verified
- ◆ the names of candidates whose portfolios were verified
- ◆ site, date of visit, time on site for any assessment locations visited
- ◆ details of action plan agreed at the time of approval or at previous visit
- ◆ summary of actions taken by the centre to meet the action plan
- ◆ details of any new action plan agreed at the end of the visit

Each approved centre should have nominated someone (normally the Centre Co-ordinator) to respond to the outcomes of the external verification visit report. You should consider asking this person to sign the external verification visit report as confirmation of agreement with its contents.

Finally, it is important that the date you receive the external verification visit report is recorded. This is to allow you to monitor any Key Performance Indicators (for the External Verifier) that are related to timescales. Evidence of dates of receipt for external verification visit reports should be made available to SQA's auditors on request.

### **Action points**

You should make the named person at the centre aware that he or she has overall responsibility for ensuring that each action point recorded on the external verification visit report is actioned.

You should design the action plan attached to the external verification visit report to ensure each action recorded is specific, measurable, achievable, reasonable and time bound.

If a centre consistently fails to meet agreed action points, you should ensure that appropriate action is taken and that details of the action are recorded in the centre's file.

### **Monitoring and evaluation of external verification visit reports**

You are expected to carry out regular monitoring and evaluation of the findings in the external verification visit reports. The monitoring and evaluation should form part of your overall monitoring and evaluation of quality assurance systems — it should not be seen as separate from your other monitoring and evaluation activities.

We would expect you to carry out such monitoring and evaluation at least annually. How you monitor and evaluate your reports is your choice, we would strongly recommend you consider the use of:

- ◆ statistical monitoring
- ◆ risk assessment

You should also consider the benefits of a database or a management information system to aid your monitoring activities. The following areas could be monitored:

- ◆ large and unexpected increase in number of candidates registered
- ◆ large and unexpected increase in number of candidates certificated
- ◆ time between candidate being registered and certificated
- ◆ ratio of candidates to Assessors, Assessors to Internal Verifiers
- ◆ rates for Trainers, Assessors and Internal Verifiers achieving qualifications of competence
- ◆ centre type in relation to total number of centres

Monitoring and evaluation may also identify opportunities to reduce the number of external verification visits to an approved centre. Where this is the case, it is important that a note stating this is placed in the centre file. Evidence of why you have reduced the number of external verification visits should be provided to SQA's auditors on request.

### **Sampling evidence**

You should ensure that your External Verifiers have access to all assessment information they need to carry out the verification process effectively. Without this information the External Verifier will be unable to authenticate claims for certification.

You should ensure that you supply the External Verifier with printed lists of candidates certificated by the centre for each qualification, prior to the external verification visit. We would recommend that each printout covers a 12-month period. This should be sufficient to identify previously verified candidates and newly registered candidates.

Using this information, the External Verifier will be able to identify a sample of candidates and cross-reference them to the assessment and verification records held at the centre. The sample should be reviewed to ensure consistency in assessment and verification practice.

The External Verifier should develop a verification-sampling plan for each approved centre. The sampling plan should ensure that over time:

- ◆ each assessment location is visited
- ◆ all assessment guidance is checked
- ◆ all internal verification practices are checked
- ◆ candidates at various stages of assessment are verified
- ◆ all Assessor and Internal Verifier decisions are checked
- ◆ new Assessors and Internal Verifiers are identified and included in every sample

A copy of the sampling plan should be located in the centre file and made available to SQA's auditors on request.

### **Centres' right to appeal against verification decision**

You should ensure that your approved centres are aware they have a right of appeal if they disagree with an external verification decision.

## Glossary

Item	Description
Accreditation	The process by which National Occupational Standards and structures become a qualification for specific awarding bodies.
Appeal	A process through which a decision or practice may be challenged.
Assessment	The process of making judgments about the extent to which a candidate's work meets the assessment criteria for a qualification or Unit.
Assessment location	A location where assessment is carried out on behalf of a centre. See also centre and satellite site.
Assessor	A person appointed to judge the evidence of a candidate's competence.
Awarding body	A body approved by a recognised agency for the purpose of certificating learner's achievement.
Centre	A single organisation, partnership between organisations or consortium accountable to an awarding body for the assessment arrangements leading to a qualification or Units — a centre could, for instance, be an educational institution, training provider or employer. It may operate across more than one organisation or site. See also assessment location and satellite site.
Centre Co-ordinator	A person nominated by an awarding body's approved centres to liaise with the awarding body.
Competence	The ability to apply knowledge, understanding and skills in performing to the standards required in employment. This includes solving problems and meeting changing demands.
Customers	Someone who makes use of or receives the products or services of an individual or organization.
Embedded	The practice of placing a Unit from one qualification into the structure of another qualification.
External verification/moderation	The process that ensures that qualifications are being assessed to the same national standards.
External Verifier/Moderator.	The person appointed by an organisation to carry out external verification/moderation. They are subject-specialists.
Feedback	The collection of post-implementation results to enhance future decision-making.
Governance boards	Governance boards or committees are formal groups set up to provide direction and management for an organisation.
Internal verifier	A person appointed by an organisation to ensure the assessments carried out within the organisation is carried out in a way that satisfies SQA's accreditation criteria and the awarding body's assessment methodology.

## Glossary

Item	Description
Key performance indicators	Financial and non-financial metrics used to quantify objectives to reflect strategic or operational performance of an organisation.
Local Enterprise Company	Funding agency for Scottish Modern Apprentices.
Maladministration	Any activity or inactivity, which results in the centre/candidate not complying with the specified requirements for delivery of the qualifications as set out in the relevant criteria where applicable.
Malpractice	Any deliberate activity or inactivity that compromises the integrity of the assessment process, or the validity of certificates. Malpractice may include a range of issues from the failure to maintain appropriate records or systems to the deliberate falsification of records in order to claim certificates. Failure by a centre to deal with identified issues may in itself constitute malpractice.
National Occupational Standards	Defined statements of the skills, knowledge and understanding needed in employment. National Occupational Standards clearly define the outcomes of competent performance.
Objectives, functional	Related to short-term objectives, a statement of means.
Objectives, short-term	The results that the awarding body seeks to achieve over a one-year period
Objectives, strategic	The results that the awarding body seeks over a multi-year period (normally 3–5 years)
Policies	Broad, precedent setting decisions that guide or substitute for repetitive managerial decision-making.
Procedure	A procedure is a series of activities, tasks, steps, decisions and other processes that, when undertaken in the sequence laid down, produces the described product or outcome
Process	A flow of information through interrelated stages of analysis towards achievement of an aim.
Reasonable adjustments	Any action that helps to reduce the effect of a disability or difficulty that places a candidate at a substantial disadvantage in the assessment process. Arrangements are approved in advance of an examination or assessment.
Registration	SQA's accrediting body considers a candidate to be registered with the awarding body from the time the candidate's details are input to the awarding body's registration database.
Regulatory authority	Agency that regulates an area of activity by codifying and enforcing rules and regulations, supervision or oversight, for the benefit of the public at large.
Risk assessment	A step in the risk management process. Risk assessment is about measuring the potential impact of a risk, and the probability that the risk will occur.

## Glossary

Item	Description
Risk management	The process of assessing risk and the development of strategies to manage the identified risk. The strategy could include transferring the risk to another party, avoiding the risk, reducing the negative effect of the risk, and accepting some or all of the consequences of a particular risk. Essentially risk management is the combination of three steps: risk assessment; exposure control; risk monitoring.
Satellite site	A location where assessment is carried out on behalf of a centre. See also centre and satellite site.
Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework	The framework is designed to make the relationships between qualifications clearer. It clarifies entry and exit points and routes for progression within and across education and training sectors. It also helps maximise the opportunities for credit transfer. In these ways it has been designed to assist learners to plan their progress and learning.
Scottish Vocational Qualification	A qualification that combines skills, knowledge and ability within a specific occupational area.
Self-assessment	A comprehensive, systematic and regular review process during which an organisation assesses its own performance against particular standards or criteria. Normally results in an action plan which identifies opportunities for improvement.
Special considerations	Procedures implemented at the time of an examination to allow attainment to be demonstrated by a candidate who has been disadvantaged by temporary illness, injury, indisposition or adverse circumstances at the time of the examination. Each request for special arrangements will be unique to the candidate or assessment.
Stakeholder	A person, group of people or an organisation that may be affected by, or has the ability to influence, a decision(s).
Statutory	Required by law.
Strategy	Large-scale future orientated plans, reflects how, when and where the organisation will compete, against whom and for what reason.
System	System is a group of elements comprising a whole with each element related to other elements. Any element which has no relationship with any other element of the system cannot be a part of that system.
Workplace Core Skills Unit	Qualification accredited by SQA, may be work-based or achieved in a formal education establishment. The 10-week rule applies to Workplace Core Skills Units.

## Useful contacts

Organisation	Address	Website
Commission for Racial Equality (Scotland)	The Tun 12 Jackson's Entry off Holyrood Road EDINBURGH EH8 8PJ	<a href="http://www.cre.gov.uk">www.cre.gov.uk</a>
Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) Northern Ireland	29 Clarendon Road Clarendon Dock Belfast BT1 3BG Telephone 028-9026 1200 Textphone 028-9024 2063 Fax (028) 9026 1234	<a href="mailto:info@ccea.org.uk">info@ccea.org.uk</a>
Department for Children, Education Lifelong Learning and Skills (DCELLs) Wales	Cathays Park Cardiff CF10 3NQ	
Disability Rights Commission	Freepost MID 02164 Stratford-upon-Avon CV37 9BR Tel: 08457 622 633 Fax: 08457 778 878	<a href="http://www.drc-gb.org">http://www.drc-gb.org</a>
DTI Employment Relations	1 Victoria Street London SW1H 0ET Tel: 020-7215 5000	<a href="mailto:dti.enquiries@dti.gsi.gov.uk">dti.enquiries@dti.gsi.gov.uk</a>
Equal opportunities (Scotland)	St Stephens House 279 Bath Street, Glasgow G2 4JL Fax: 0141-248 5834 Tel: 0845 601 5901	<a href="mailto:scotland@eoc.org.uk">scotland@eoc.org.uk</a>
Equal opportunities (UK)	Arndale House, Arndale Centre Manchester M4 3EQ Fax: 0161-838 8312 Tel: 0845 601 5901	<a href="mailto:info@eoc.org.uk">info@eoc.org.uk</a>
Public Concern at Work	Suite 301 16 Baldwins Gardens London EC1N 7RJ Tel: 020-7404 6609 Fax: 020-7404 6576	<a href="mailto:whistle@pcaw.co.uk">whistle@pcaw.co.uk</a>
Qualifications and Curriculum Authority	83 Piccadilly London W1J 8QA Tel: 020-7509 666	<a href="mailto:inof@qca.org.uk">inof@qca.org.uk</a>
Scottish Executive Enterprise, Transport and Lifelong learning Department	6 <sup>th</sup> Floor Meridian Court Cadogan Street Glasgow	<a href="http://www.scotland.gov.uk">www.scotland.gov.uk</a>

<b>Organisation</b>	<b>Address</b>	<b>Website</b>
	G2 6AT Tel: 0141-248 4774 Fax: 0141-242 5665	
Sector Skills Development Agency	3 Callflex Business Park Golden Smithies Lane Wath-Upon-Dearne South Yorkshire S63 7ER Tel: 01709 765444	<a href="http://www.ssda.org.uk">www.ssda.org.uk</a>
SQA Accreditation	The Optima Building 58 Robertson Street Glasgow G2 8DQ	<a href="http://www.sqa.org.uk/accreditation">www.sqa.org.uk/accreditation</a>
SSAScot	28 Castle Street Edinburgh EH2 3HT Tel: 0131-226 7726 Fax: 0131-220 6431	<a href="http://www.ssascot.org.uk">www.ssascot.org.uk</a>
The Information Commissioner's website		<a href="http://www.informationcommissioner.gov.uk">http://www.informationcommissioner.gov.uk</a>
The Scottish Executive Freedom of Information Unit, website		<a href="http://www.scotland.gov.uk/topics/">http://www.scotland.gov.uk/topics/</a>
The Scottish Information Commissioner's website		<a href="http://www.itspublicknowledge.info/">http://www.itspublicknowledge.info/</a>
UK/British Employment Law		<a href="http://www.emplaw.co.uk/topinfo/portal.htm">www.emplaw.co.uk/topinfo/portal.htm</a>

Online copies of Acts of United Kingdom and Scottish Parliament and Statutory Instruments can be found at [www.hmsso.gov.uk](http://www.hmsso.gov.uk).