

Guide to Approval for Training Providers and Employers

First edition: March 2000

This edition: May 2006

Publication code: AA0961/6

Published by the Scottish Qualifications Authority
The Optima Building, 58 Robertson Street, Glasgow, G2 8DQ
Ironmills Road, Dalkeith, Midlothian EH22 1LE

www.sqa.org.uk

The information in this publication may be reproduced in support of SQA qualifications. If it is reproduced, SQA should be clearly acknowledged as the source. If it is to be used for any other purpose, then written permission must be obtained from the Publications Team, Customer Relations and Marketing at SQA. It must not be reproduced for trade or commercial purposes.

© Scottish Qualifications Authority 1999, 2000, 2002, 2006

For an up-to-date list of prices visit the **Publication Sales and Downloads** section of SQA's website.

This document can be produced, on request, in alternative formats, including large type, braille and numerous community languages. For further details telephone SQA's Customer Contact Centre on 0845 279 1000.

SQA is committed to using plain English. We will try to make our publications as easy and straightforward to understand as we can, and will try to avoid all unnecessary jargon. If there's any language in this document that you feel is hard to understand, or could be improved, please write to Editor, Publications Team, at the Glasgow address above or e-mail: editor@sqa.org.uk.

Contents

Introduction	1
1 Approval: an overview	2
Approval duties of Quality Assurance Managers and External Verifiers	3
2 Applying for approval: overview	4
Help available before you apply for approval	4
3 Applying for approval as an SQA centre	6
First steps: completing the application form for initial approval as an SQA centre	6
Section 1: About your organisation	6
Section 2: Approval criteria	8
Section 3: Declaration	14
Once you've sent in your application	15
Approval without a visit	15
Approval decisions	15
Further help and information	16
4 Applying for approval to offer a specific qualification	17
First steps — your application	17
Completing the application form for approval to offer SQA qualifications	18
Section 1	19
Section 2	19
Section 3	20
Once you've sent in your application	23
What happens after approval	24
Further help and information	25
External assessment	25
Accommodation	26
Supplementary facilities and equipment	26
Staff	27
Management of information	27
Appendix: specific qualification approval checklist	29

Introduction

This guide is designed to be of use to the following organisations:

- ◆ private training providers whose sole purpose is the delivery of training and the assessment of candidates
- ◆ private and public sector companies who offer training to their employees
- ◆ other organisations, including those outwith Scotland, who wish to offer SQA qualifications

There are three families of qualifications in the SQA framework: Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQs); National Qualifications (NQs); and Higher National qualifications (HNs). In this guide, we assume that you are mainly interested in offering SVQs — the terminology we use, and the guidance and examples we give, reflect this.

1 Approval: an overview

There are two types of approval:

- ◆ approval as an SQA centre
- ◆ approval to offer specific qualifications

In **centre approval** we make sure that your centre has the management structure and quality assurance systems to support the delivery, assessment and internal verification of SQA qualifications.

In **approval to offer specific qualifications** we make sure that, once you have decided on delivering a qualification, your centre has the staff, reference and learning materials, assessment materials, equipment and accommodation you will need to deliver and assess the specific qualification. We also check your internal verification system to ensure that it meets our quality requirements.

For both types of approval, you must demonstrate your **potential** to meet our approval criteria. You will have to show that you are continuing to meet our criteria after approval as you deliver and assess qualifications.

We routinely monitor all our approved centres to ensure that the national standards for our qualifications are maintained. For some jointly-awarded qualifications, other professional bodies or institutions, which have a formal agreement with SQA, will do some or all of the monitoring. We reserve the right to withdraw approval should we find that your centre is not meeting our criteria. Further details of our monitoring processes are in the section ‘What happens after approval’ (page 24).

Your centre number will be issued to you after you have been approved as an SQA centre and have also been approved to offer your first qualification.

Approval duties of Quality Assurance Managers and External Verifiers

Quality Assurance Managers (QAMs) are specialists in auditing quality assurance systems, and are responsible for groups of centres in one geographical area (Dumfries and Galloway, for instance). This allows them to become familiar with the centres in their area, to get to know the members of staff and provide continuity in monitoring the operation of centres' quality systems for delivery and assessment of SQA qualifications.

You are likely to come into contact with QAMs during the approval process as they:

- ◆ scrutinise your application for initial approval as an SQA centre
- ◆ visit your centre to check that you can meet the criteria for initial approval, including the criteria for internal verification
- ◆ prepare an initial evaluation report on you as a prospective SQA centre
- ◆ make recommendations to SQA on your approval as a centre
- ◆ consider evidence for lifting any conditions imposed on your approval
- ◆ support External Verifiers on visits to your centre, where this is required

External Verifiers are subject specialists. Each is responsible for the SQA qualifications in a subject area known as a *verification group*.

External Verifiers will:

- ◆ visit your centre, at our request, to check that you are meeting the SQA criteria for approval to offer specific qualifications
- ◆ check your internal verification procedures as they apply to the delivery and assessment of specific qualifications
- ◆ make recommendations to SQA on the approval of your centre to offer specific qualifications
- ◆ consider evidence for lifting any conditions imposed on approval
- ◆ visit your centre, at your request, to offer development advice. A charge is normally made for visits initiated by the centre

Note

We use the terms 'verification' and 'verifier' rather than 'moderation' and 'moderator' to describe this aspect of quality assurance in the context of all our qualifications; these terms are used in the rest of the UK in the context of NVQs.

2 Applying for approval: overview

The next two sections of the guide tell you how to apply for approval. If you are seeking initial approval as a centre you should read both sections 3 and 4. Section 3 tells you how to apply for initial approval as an SQA centre. Section 4 deals with how to apply for approval to offer a specific qualification.

You should apply for centre approval and approval to offer your first specific qualification at the same time. A centre number will be issued to you when both applications have been successful. You will then be able to offer SQA qualifications to your candidates.

After you have achieved initial approval, we will monitor your progress in entering candidates. If you do not enter candidates within six months of being approved, we will again contact you to discuss how we might assist you. If, within one year of achieving approval to offer a qualification, no candidates have been entered in that verification group, we reserve the right to remove approval to offer that qualification. If no candidates have been entered for any qualification within this time we also reserve the right to remove centre approval.

Help available before you apply for approval

We can help you in many ways throughout the approval process. If you are thinking of applying for approval, call our Customer Contact Centre on 0845 279 1000. The staff will be able to answer any queries you might have about approval, and will send you an information pack, which includes:

- ◆ our centre approval and specific qualification approval application forms
- ◆ Approval Information leaflet containing information on our costs and support available prior to coming forward for approval

We can also arrange for a Customer Account Manager to visit your centre to provide assistance before you apply for approval. There is no charge for this service. The Customer Account Manager will be able to tell you about the full range of SQA qualifications, and help you to prepare for approval. You can contact our Customer Relations Team through our Customer Contact Centre on 0845 279 1000.

Before applying for approval to offer a specific qualification you can ask for a development visit from one or more of our External Verifiers. The Verifier will be able to advise you on the resources you will need, and on strategies for assessing qualifications. We charge for this service. To find out more or to ask for a development visit, contact our Verification Team.

You should make sure you have the current specifications for the qualifications and Units you wish to offer before you make your application for approval to

offer a specific qualification. For further information on current Units, and to order copies of any publications, call our Customer Contact Centre on **0845 279 1000**.

We realise that you will have your own concerns about the approval process. We aim to provide all the assistance we can to make sure that your application for approval is successful. Don't hesitate to ask — we are here to help.

3 Applying for approval as an SQA centre

This section tells you what sort of evidence you will need to satisfy us that you can meet the criteria for approval as a centre and for internal verification. It concentrates on the approval application form, and gives advice on the sorts of things we are looking for from your centre when we make our approval decision.

If you are already approved as an SQA centre go to section 4 (page 17).

First steps: completing the application form for initial approval as an SQA centre

The first thing to do if you want approval as an SQA centre is to ask for an approval information pack from our Approval Team. This includes a copy of the application form for approval as an SQA centre. You only need to complete this form if your centre is **not** already approved as an SQA centre. Provision of a centre number is also dependent on meeting the approval requirements for your first specific qualifications.

It will be helpful if you refer to the form as you read the following sections.

Section 1: About your organisation

The first section of the form asks for information about your centre.

It asks for two names: Head of Centre, and SQA Co-ordinator (this can be the same person).

The SQA Co-ordinator is the person you nominate as the primary point of contact between your centre and SQA. Once your centre is approved to offer a specific qualification, your SQA Co-ordinator will be responsible for ensuring that other functions are carried out. These will include:

- ◆ liaising with all sections in the centre involved in the delivery and assessment of SQA qualifications
- ◆ maintaining candidate records
- ◆ sending us candidate registration and entry information
- ◆ notifying us of candidates' results
- ◆ sending candidate evidence to us for central verification, when requested by us
- ◆ ensuring that visiting QAMs and External Verifiers have access to all necessary materials, evidence and, where applicable, sites

Additional sites: Sometimes centres need to be able to assess qualifications at more than one location. For example:

- ◆ the headquarters of the organisation may be the approved centre but it will offer the qualification throughout its branches
- ◆ a training provider may deliver the qualification on employers' premises

We deal with **the centre** — not the site — for all quality assurance arrangements, including candidate entry. However, in your application, you should list the addresses of *all sites* involved in the delivery of SQA qualifications including sites overseas if applicable.

Your quality assurance systems must extend to any site involved in the delivery of the qualification. It will be your responsibility to ensure that a **single internal verification system** operates across the group of sites, ensuring a common assessment standard across all sites and all assessors.

Visits for initial approval as an SQA centre will normally take place at the main centre, but we reserve the right to visit sites either at the time of initial approval or when further sites are being added to the centre's profile. It should be noted that, if we have to visit centres and sites outwith Scotland for approval or quality assurance purposes, daily fees, travel and subsistence costs for such visits will be charged to the centre.

Sometimes it will not be possible to identify sites at the time of making your approval application. If this is the case, you should have a checklist of criteria which you will use to select sites. This should include confirmation that, for each site:

- ◆ there is a safe and healthy environment for candidates, staff and visitors
- ◆ there is a commitment to your centre's equal opportunities policy in terms of access to and assessment of the qualification
- ◆ candidates have access to the appropriate equipment, materials and staff for the qualifications being delivered and assessed at the site
- ◆ there will be access for assessors, internal verifiers and SQA personnel, as appropriate
- ◆ candidates and/or staff will be given sufficient time to attend relevant meetings

This checklist should also include space for the signature of a senior person from the main centre as confirmation that the site meets the SQA approval criteria and that quality assurance will be maintained.

We also recognise multi-centre relationships, in which two or more centres collaborate in the delivery of a qualification but each centre enters candidates separately for SQA qualifications. In such a relationship, since each centre in the

group takes responsibility for entry of its own candidates, SQA deals with each as a separate centre for quality assurance and certification.

Specific qualification approval: We normally expect you to apply for approval to offer your first specific qualification at the same time as centre approval. If you have not yet applied for this, you should tell us about the areas of SQA provision that you are interested in delivering, and give us some indication of when you intend to make your approval application. A centre number will not be issued to you until both centre and the first specific qualification applications have been successful.

Section 2: Approval criteria

This section of the form asks you to describe the systems which you will have put in place to meet the criteria for approval as an SQA centre and for internal verification. During the approval visit, the QAM will look at the evidence which supports your answers and will expect to see documented policies and procedures. This may be a full quality manual, or simply a description of what activities are to be carried out, in what sequence, and by whom.

Management of internal quality assurance: Things you should consider at this point include:

- ◆ Do you have sufficient numbers of trainers, assessors, and internal verifiers for the anticipated number of candidates?
- ◆ Can you provide us with details of your organisation's structure and show how it relates to the delivery of SQA qualifications? Does this show the lines of responsibility and support for both staff and candidates?
- ◆ Is your centre's administrative support adequate for implementing the necessary systems?
- ◆ Has an appropriate member of staff been appointed as SQA Co-ordinator?
- ◆ Will you be able to gather feedback so that you can monitor and review the operation of your systems, to ensure continued compliance with our criteria and continuous improvement?

Evidence to support this part of the application could include:

- ◆ an organisational chart naming staff in key roles and showing lines of responsibility and support
- ◆ descriptions of responsibilities in relation to SQA qualifications for members of staff
- ◆ a description of systems of communication among staff
- ◆ reference to existing systems which support the delivery of other qualifications and/or training
- ◆ your arrangements for internal review of quality assurance (eg internal audit procedures)

Management of information: We require all centres to have a system for storing information on SQA qualifications, policies, and procedures so that it is accessible to all relevant staff.

Evidence to support this part of the application could include:

- ◆ details of methods of storing information, eg paper filing system, information centre, staff resource base or computer database

The centre should also have a system for disseminating this information. The **SQA Co-ordinator** is responsible for sending information from SQA to your centre's staff. Staff involved in a qualification should be kept informed of any matters which affect its delivery and assessment.

Evidence to support this part of the application could include:

- ◆ a management information system, eg staff meetings and staff notice boards
- ◆ procedures for the distribution of mail and any other documentation from SQA
- ◆ designated member of staff (SQA Co-ordinator) to be responsible for the distribution of information

All centres are required to maintain records on candidates' progress. Evidence to support this part of the application could include:

- ◆ methods of maintaining records, eg paper filing system or computer database
- ◆ information on where records are to be kept, eg in a central location, in the workplace or by individual members of staff
- ◆ secure facilities for the storage of records
- ◆ procedures for the disposal of records
- ◆ roles and responsibilities of staff with respect to record keeping

We also require centres to have a system for forwarding candidate information to SQA.

The **SQA Co-ordinator** is responsible for providing all information requested by SQA. His/her responsibilities will include:

- ◆ registering candidates and obtaining Scottish Candidate Numbers (SCNs) from SQA where necessary
- ◆ entering candidates for qualifications in accordance with timescales published by SQA
- ◆ ensuring candidates' records are maintained
- ◆ providing information on candidates' progress

- ◆ ensuring that candidates have given consent to sharing personal data with SQA under the terms of the Data Protection Act (1998)

The centre must have a system for ensuring that all staff assessing and internally verifying qualifications are appropriately qualified/experienced. This system should ensure that relevant information is made available to the SQA Co-ordinator for forwarding to SQA in support of approval applications. Information provided will be returned to you after scrutiny. After approval has been obtained, there is no need to send information on staff changes to SQA as the External Verifier will ask for this information during verification visits.

Evidence to support this part of the application could include:

- ◆ procedures for the internal recording of candidate information
- ◆ procedures for informing SQA of candidates' progress
- ◆ administrative assistance available
- ◆ roles and responsibilities of staff involved

External quality assurance: SQA deploys External Verifiers to sample the work of your candidates to check that the qualifications are being assessed in a way which maintains national standards. The way this works for SVQs is that External Verifiers will visit your centre. We also use central verification for some qualifications, which means that we may sometimes ask you to send us evidence for a sample of candidates chosen by us. The **SQA Co-ordinator** is normally responsible for providing all the information we request and for collating any of the candidates' evidence requested for central verification or visits from External Verifiers.

Evidence to support this part of your application could include:

- ◆ the name of the person who is responsible for the co-ordination of all external verification visits (normally the SQA Co-ordinator)
- ◆ an outline of the procedures to be followed to ensure that assessment materials are available when the External Verifier visits — this is especially important when the centre consists of more than one site
- ◆ a system to ensure that staff understand this process and SQA requirements, including those relating to how long you need to retain candidate evidence
- ◆ a system to ensure that action is taken as the result of any feedback from our external verification processes

Resource management: It is your responsibility to ensure that you have sufficient resources to enable all candidates to achieve the competences defined in our qualifications. This applies to all sites where the qualification is to be offered. 'Resources' in this context means staff, accommodation, equipment, and materials.

Evidence to support this part of your application could include:

- ◆ procedures for accessing resources
- ◆ learning materials, eg standard texts, handouts, videos, working instructions/procedures
- ◆ reference materials, eg professional journals, company reports, codes of practice, British Standards
- ◆ resources for assessment
- ◆ checklists to ensure that resources are adequate at all sites where the qualification is to be offered
- ◆ roles and responsibilities of staff in allocating and reviewing resources

Financial viability: We will seek information about your centre's financial viability. Banks will only reply to enquiries with the express consent of the customer concerned, so it helps us if you complete and return the form entitled 'Private and Confidential — Status Enquiry and Consent Form' which we send out with the application form.

Management of staff: You should supply details of your staff recruitment, induction and development policies. We need to be sure that you have a system in place to ensure that you have enough qualified staff to meet the requirements of all qualifications on offer. Your staff should be given adequate opportunity for their own development, and there should be a system for establishing their requirements.

Evidence to support this part of the application could include:

- ◆ a system for identifying the qualifications and experience required by staff involved in the delivery and assessment of SQA provision
- ◆ a system for the induction of staff into their roles as assessors and internal verifiers in your centre
- ◆ a staff development and review system

Management of candidates: Centres must have an induction, guidance and support system for candidates.

It is your responsibility to ensure that candidates are given adequate support from their initial entry through to certification. You should provide details of the systems of induction, guidance and support that you have set up for your candidates. Candidates should know and understand:

- ◆ the background to the qualification
- ◆ the application and benefits of the qualification
- ◆ the requirements of the qualification

- ◆ the training and support available
- ◆ the processes for assessment, review, guidance, evidence-gathering and portfolio-development (if applicable)
- ◆ the recording and certification systems
- ◆ the roles and responsibilities of staff in delivering SQA qualifications

Evidence to support this part of your application could include: a handbook for candidates which, in addition to the information about the course (see previous paragraph) could include information on:

- ◆ health and safety
- ◆ appeals system
- ◆ equal opportunities policy
- ◆ information on the centre
- ◆ information on staff, ie roles and responsibilities of assessors, internal verifiers and mentors, expert witnesses
- ◆ candidates' responsibilities for gathering evidence

You should be able to demonstrate your commitment to equal opportunity in the selection, admission and assessment of candidates.

Any centre offering SQA qualifications should ensure that everyone eligible has an equal chance of benefiting from the services it provides. You should provide details of your centre's equal opportunities policy and records that show that it is being followed. There may be instances where centres, by their nature, cannot operate equal opportunities policies — eg prisons, or centres where the provision is aimed at a specific group of people. In these instances we will respect your circumstances but we will ask you to supply details on the form so we can make a reasonable judgement about how you are addressing the criterion for access and equal opportunities.

Appeals: If a candidate disagrees with an assessment decision, he or she should have the right to appeal. He or she should know the grounds on which an appeal can be made, and the procedure for doing so. You should provide details on the centre's appeals procedure. The procedure should:

- ◆ state that appeals will be dealt with internally
- ◆ set out the basis on which appeals may be made
- ◆ outline the steps to be followed in conducting an appeal (see * overleaf)
- ◆ ensure the maintenance of full records at each stage (ie the nature of the appeal, persons involved and dates of discussions and meetings, and the decision reached) as evidence that an appeal has been processed

It will help you and the candidate to have set timescales within which each stage of an appeal will be processed.

*There should be at least three stages in your procedure:

- 1 Initially, the assessor should deal with any concern about assessment.
- 2 If the matter has been discussed and no satisfactory outcome has been achieved, the candidate and assessor should refer the matter to the internal verifier identified by the centre.
- 3 If no satisfactory outcome has been achieved after this discussion, the candidate may appeal to an independent third party. This could be another internal verifier not previously involved in the assessment of the candidate or a named individual from within or from outside the centre with a broad expertise in the qualification area.

Details of your appeals procedure should be enclosed with the application form.

Complaints/grievance process: A centre must have a documented procedure for dealing with complaints from candidates on matters not directly involving assessment decisions.

Internal verification: A centre must have an internal verification system to ensure that:

- ◆ results are consistent between assessors where more than one assessor assesses the same Unit
- ◆ assessors' judgements are consistent for different candidates
- ◆ assessment and recording procedures are followed
- ◆ evidence of assessment is available for the External Verifier

Your internal verification procedures should ensure that:

- ◆ The roles and responsibilities of all those involved in the assessment and internal verification process are documented.
- ◆ All learning and assessment materials used for the qualifications are subject to a system of internal verification.
- ◆ All assessors and internal verifiers involved in the qualification meet regularly to agree and familiarise themselves with the materials to be used and to establish consistency of interpretation and assessment of the standards. These meetings will take place before, during and after the assessment of the qualification. (The purpose of these meetings is to ensure that appropriate assessment materials are available before delivery, to monitor consistency of assessment decisions during delivery, and to review assessment practice after delivery.)

- ◆ All items to be discussed are set down in an agenda and decisions and action points are recorded in the minutes.
- ◆ There is a statement of the methods used by the centre's internal verifiers, eg:
 - sampling assessments to monitor consistency eg cross-marking
 - countersigning of assessment records kept by the assessors
 - observing a sample of assessments to monitor their consistency, eg dual assessment
 - supporting assessors by offering guidance and advice

An internal verifier can, of course, also act as an assessor, but cannot internally verify assessment evidence from a candidate if he or she is involved in carrying out that assessment with that candidate. In such cases another internal verifier must do the verification.

The internal verifier will also be responsible for implementing the centre's appeals procedure to settle any disputes between candidates and assessors.

Supplementary information: The documents you need to send with your application form are:

- ◆ completed Status Enquiry Consent form
- ◆ your appeals procedure for candidates
- ◆ your equal opportunities policy
- ◆ your health and safety policy
- ◆ your internal verification procedures

And, if appropriate:

- ◆ your site selection checklist
- ◆ awarding body letter of approval
- ◆ a copy of your current Scottish Quality Management System (SQMS) certificate (see 'Approval without a visit' on page 15)

It is not necessary to send anything else with your application — the QAM will discuss details of your documented policies and procedures with you on the day of the approval visit and compile a report of his or her findings for us.

Section 3: Declaration

Your application should be signed and dated by one of the two people named at the start of the form (Head of Centre or SQA Co-ordinator). The signature will be regarded as agreement to pay all fees associated with the application. The application cannot be processed unless the form is signed.

Once you've sent in your application

You should send your completed application form, and any documentation that supports your application, to the Approval Team in SQA. We will acknowledge receipt, and if we find we need any more information, we will get in touch with your SQA Co-ordinator.

When we have all the information we need, we will contact your SQA Co-ordinator to arrange a convenient time for a centre approval visit by a QAM. An External Verifier will normally also visit to report on your readiness to offer your first specific qualification and any other applications. See section 4 for further information.

The QAM will look for evidence that your centre has the potential to meet the criteria for approval as an SQA centre.

NB the QAM and External Verifier will be compiling reports during their approval visits. It would be very helpful if you could provide somewhere private where they can do this.

At the end of the visit, the QAM will give your SQA Co-ordinator a verbal report on the findings of the visit, outlining the recommendations on approval that will be made to SQA's Approval Officer Group. This group, which meets frequently throughout the year, will then consider your application (together with the QAM's and External Verifier's reports and recommendations) and will make a formal decision on whether or not your centre is to be approved.

Approval without a visit

If you have already been approved by another awarding body in the UK, it may be possible for us to approve your centre without a visit. If you have been successful in a Scottish Quality Management System (SQMS) audit the approval process will be abbreviated. Our Approval Team will be able to give you guidance about this.

Approval decisions

The Approval Officer Group will make one of three decisions, and notify your SQA Co-ordinator in writing:

Approved: this means that we consider your centre to have the potential to support the delivery of SQA qualifications. We may also make recommendations about enhancing your systems.

You will be allocated a centre number when both centre approval and your first specific qualification applications have been successfully

achieved. You should use this number on all the forms and documentation that you submit to SQA.

Approval withheld until conditions are met: we will make this decision if we think that your centre is not yet able to meet one or more of the approval criteria (eg because there is a lack of documented procedures or because of the absence of an appeals procedure).

You will be asked to provide more evidence of your centre's ability to meet the approval criteria. Depending on the nature of this evidence, the QAM or External Verifier may have to make a return visit. Once all the conditions have been met, your centre will be given approval.

Not Approved: this means that your centre does not meet the approval criteria and that considerable development is required before you can be expected to meet these criteria.

The letter informing your SQA Co-ordinator of the decision will include an offer of further assistance from SQA.

You have the right to appeal against a decision that you consider inappropriate. You should, in the first instance, either telephone or write to the Approval Team, who will send you details of our appeals procedure.

Further help and information

Please remember that we will always be very happy to assist you as you go through the process of becoming an SQA centre and gaining approval to offer specific SQA qualifications.

If you have any questions, please ring the Approval Team.

You will be put in touch with the member of staff who is responsible for all centres in your local area. He or she will be able to give you detailed information about the approval process, the people involved, and the timescales, and any additional support you need.

After you achieve centre approval, and approval to offer your first specific qualification, we will monitor your progress towards entering candidates for our qualifications. If you do not provide candidate entries within six months of receiving your centre number, we will contact you to discuss how we might assist you.

We reserve the right to remove centre approval from any centre that has not provided any candidate entries, submitted candidate results or obtained approval to offer specific qualifications within the previous twelve months.

4 Applying for approval to offer a specific qualification

This section of the guide tells you what sort of evidence you will need to satisfy us that you can meet the criteria for approval to offer a specific qualification.

First steps — your application

We will acknowledge our receipt of your centre's application.

We will look at your application and see whether we need more details. If we do need more information from you, we will contact the person you have nominated as your main contact for this qualification — normally your SQA Co-ordinator.

We will then consider your application, and this may include a visit to your centre. An approval visit may not be necessary if your application is satisfactorily completed and:

- ◆ your centre has experience of offering SQA qualifications in the same subject areas
- ◆ successful external verification has been carried out recently in the same subject area
- ◆ for National Qualifications, you are using material from the National Assessment Bank, where available, or your own assessment material which has already been verified by SQA's Verification Team

If you wish to offer a National Course which includes external assessment in the form of an examination, and you have not offered a National Course before, we ask you to notify us on the appropriate form, which can be obtained from SQA's Approval Team. There is more information about this at the end of this section (page 25).

Completing the application form for approval to offer SQA qualifications

Before you make your application you should make sure you have the current version of the qualifications and Units you wish to offer. For a current publications list, further information on current qualifications, and to order copies of any publications, call our Customer Contact Centre on **0845 279 1000**.

We have developed a checklist to help you to ensure that you have filled in the sections of the form which are relevant to your application; The checklist is shaded so that you can be sure that you are filling in the sections relevant to your particular application. See Appendix (page 29).

Cover sheet

The cover sheet asks for details about your centre and the types of qualification for which you are seeking approval.

Please ensure that you have ticked the appropriate boxes for the type of qualifications you wish to offer. You do not need to submit separate forms for qualifications in the same subject or occupational areas, even if they are drawn from different qualification families (NQs, HNs, or SVQs). You should submit separate forms for qualifications in different subject or occupational areas, as details on the resources used to deliver the qualifications will differ.

An example

If you want to offer:

- ◆ SVQ in Accounting at level 2
- and
- ◆ HNC in Accounting
- one form is acceptable.

On the other hand, if you want to offer:

- ◆ SVQ in Amenity Horticulture
- and
- ◆ SVQ in Fisheries Management
- you should submit two separate forms.

If you are in doubt, please call the Approval Team for advice.

Documents submitted with this application

If you are sending any supporting documentation, please list it here. If you have insufficient space in any part of this form, please continue on a separate sheet, and list all the extra sheets in this section.

Declaration

The application should be signed and dated by the authorised signatory. This should be a person with sufficient status and authority to be responsible for the quality of delivery and assessment of SQA qualifications throughout your centre. We will not be able to process your application until it has been signed. By signing this declaration, you are confirming that you will allow access to SQA personnel for the purpose of monitoring national standards, which is a condition of your approval as an SQA centre.

Section 1

Qualification details

For each qualification, please give:

- ◆ the full title of the qualification, eg SVQ Accounting
- ◆ the level eg level 2 (for an SVQ), HNC (for HN), Intermediate 1 (for NQ), and the qualification number
- ◆ the numbers and titles of the individual Units which you wish to offer, using the '4+2' SQA code numbers

Potential candidates who wish to know if there is a local centre offering a particular qualification, sometimes ask us for this information. Please let us know on this part of the form if you do not want this information to be made available to such third parties.

Section 2

Details of previous experience of assessment in this qualification area

If you have experience of assessing SQA (or SEB or SCOTVEC) qualifications in this subject area, please list the relevant details here. This will enable us to process your application quickly, and, if possible, without making a visit.

Section 3

Resources to be used to support the assessment of the qualification(s)

Accommodation: This section of the form asks you to supply details of the resources you intend to use to support the assessment of the qualification. Before completing this part of the application, it is important that you are familiar with the content of the Units which make up the qualification. Your centre should provide an environment which helps candidates to achieve the qualification and which ensures that technical and specialist needs are covered. We need to be sure that you have sufficient equipment to allow every candidate to achieve the competences defined in the qualification and particularly that they will be able to cover the Range Statements over which these competences have to be assessed.

Equipment: If you intend to use shared resources (eg specialised reference materials and equipment), please describe the arrangements and provide evidence that agreement has been obtained from the owners of the resources. If you are using sites for the delivery and assessment of this qualification, please send us your site selection checklist if you have not already done so as part of your centre approval application. Topics for inclusion in a site selection checklist may be found on page 7.

Reference and learning materials: Reference and learning materials available to candidates could include:

- ◆ standard texts, handouts, videos, case studies, working instructions, procedures and manuals, technical publications, professional journals, codes of practice and British Standards

Assessment materials: For **Higher National Qualifications** and **Scottish Vocational Qualifications**, please provide details of how you intend to assess candidates (ie the methods of assessment — observation in the workplace, practical exercises, role play, case studies, written and/or oral questions, simulation). You may wish to produce an assessment plan indicating which Units or Elements or series of Elements are to be assessed by your chosen methods of assessment.

Please remember that it is not necessary to assess each Performance Criterion separately — assessment of different Elements or Performance Criteria can and should be integrated (see SQA's *Guide to Assessment and Quality Assurance for Training Providers and Employers* (A0842) for more details on this).

For **National Qualifications**, if you are using materials from the National Assessment Bank, you do not need to submit any further information about assessment materials.

If you are using assessment material which has not been verified by us, we would strongly advise you to seek prior verification. We will pass assessment materials

submitted with this form to our Verification Team, and will contact you when we have received their comments.

For all three SQA qualification families, in order that we can assess your potential to deliver and assess the qualifications, we expect to see:

- ◆ fully expanded learning and assessment materials for all the Units you intend to offer during the first six months of the qualification — a minimum of six Units

If you are applying for approval to offer individual Units rather than a course or Group Award, we require the same amount of evidence. If your application is for fewer than six Units, full evidence for all these Units must be provided, whatever the timescale for their delivery.

If you are applying for approval to offer an SVQ, and intend to offer candidates the opportunity to achieve the Units in any order, we will expect to see fully expanded learning and assessment materials for **all** the Units which you are applying to offer.

- ◆ For a practical task, give us a full description of the task with a checklist containing the skills which you expect to observe.
- ◆ For written questions, give us the full set of questions along with the solutions and marking scheme.

Additional evidence to support your application could include:

- ◆ an assessment schedule for a typical candidate indicating where integration could be achieved and the timing of assessments
- ◆ procedures for remediation and reassessment
- ◆ arrangements for accreditation of prior learning (APL)

Where some or all of the qualification is achieved through an integrated project or assignment (for example, Video Production or Fashion Design) or where candidate evidence is going to occur naturally through normal work tasks, it may be difficult for you to provide the sample of material outlined above. Please contact our Approval Team if you need any help in deciding on an appropriate amount of evidence.

Internal verification: Please give us a brief description of how your centre's internal verification system applies to this qualification, and let us know how many candidates, assessors, and internal verifiers will be involved with the qualification.

Staff qualifications and experience: Staff need to be:

- ◆ competent in the subject/occupational area to a level appropriate to the qualification
- ◆ competent in assessment (or internal verification) of the type involved in the qualification
- ◆ familiar with the procedures and documentation for the qualification

You should supply details of **all** members of staff who will be assessors and/or internal verifiers for the qualification. These details should include the names of staff members and the Units which each will be delivering and/or assessing. Where applicable, you should also give details of the site where the assessment will take place. Finally, you should identify which members of staff are internal verifiers and which are assessors. (Remember that internal verifiers cannot verify the assessment evidence for any candidate whom they have personally assessed).

For each member of staff listed you are asked to supply details of the qualifications and experience as they relate to the Units for which they are responsible. This information should be completed and signed by the member of staff, as a confirmation to us that they are aware of their role in the qualification. Tell us where and when relevant qualifications were achieved or the work experience was gained. It would be helpful if you would give us brief outlines of the courses or work experience undertaken, using full titles rather than abbreviations.

For SVQs, assessors and internal verifiers should be competent to the standards defined by the Standard Setting Bodies (SSBs) commonly known as the ‘A’ or ‘V’ Units (or predecessor Units).

Alternatively, those who assess and internally verify these qualifications should hold Scottish teaching qualifications for secondary education or further education (**TQSE** or **TQFE**), which embrace these standards, or should be working towards the relevant A or V Units.

The Units which assessors and internal verifiers will be required to achieve are:

- A1 Assess Candidates using a Range of Methods
- A2 Assess Candidates Performance through Observation
- V1 Conduct Internal Quality Assurance of the Assessment Process

We recognise that staff may be working towards achievement of the A or V Units at the time of seeking approval to offer a qualification. Where this is the case, we will check progress towards achievement at subsequent monitoring visits.

The following predecessor qualifications are also acceptable:

Assessors

D32 Assess candidate performance

and/or (depending on the nature of the assessment being conducted)

D33 Assess candidate performance using differing sources of evidence

Internal Verifiers

D34 Internally verify the assessment process

Once you've sent in your application

If we decide that an approval visit is necessary, our Approval Team will arrange a convenient date and time with your SQA Co-ordinator and confirm the arrangements in writing. The visiting team will consist of an External Verifier for each of the subject areas involved. If several External Verifiers need to visit you at the same time, they are likely to be accompanied by a QAM.

If the team is large, it would be helpful if you could provide a room where they could meet during the visit.

External Verifiers will look for evidence that your centre has the **potential** to meet the criteria for approval to offer the specific qualification.

At the end of the visit, the verifiers will tell your SQA Co-ordinator about the recommendations on approval they will be making. Whether a visit takes place or not, the recommendations are passed to SQA's Approval Officer Group — this group is responsible for making the final decision on approval to offer specific qualifications.

The SQA Approval Officer Group will make one of three decisions. The Approval Team will send written confirmation of our decision to your SQA Co-ordinator

Approved: this means that we consider that your centre has the potential to support the delivery and assessment of specific SQA qualifications. We may make recommendations to help you to enhance your delivery and assessment of these qualifications.

If this is the first time your centre has been approved to offer a qualification, we will send you a starter pack.

Approval withheld until conditions are met: we will make this decision if we consider that you are not yet able to meet one or more of the approval criteria (eg specialised equipment not available, inadequate learning materials or assessments not measuring the stated performance

criteria). Your centre will not be approved until SQA is sure that these conditions have been met.

You will be asked to provide more evidence of your centre's ability to meet the approval criteria. Depending on the nature of the evidence requested, there may be occasions where an External Verifier has to make a visit to the centre. Once all conditions have been met, your centre will be approved to offer the qualification.

Not approved: this means that your centre does not meet the approval criteria and that considerable development is required before you can be expected to meet these criteria.

If the decision is 'not approved', the letter informing your centre of the decision will include an offer of further assistance from SQA.

You have the right to appeal against a decision which you consider to be inappropriate. You should, in the first instance, telephone or write to the Approval Team, who will send you details of our appeals procedure.

What happens after approval

When you have received formal approval from us as a centre, including your first approval to offer specific SQA qualifications, you can start to enter candidates for them. We will regularly monitor your quality assurance in relation to SQA qualifications but, as you become more experienced, and we build up a record of your satisfactory delivery and assessment of our qualifications, we may reduce the frequency of this monitoring.

Your QAM will visit you to ensure that your systems are fulfilling their potential, and will monitor your compliance with our quality assurance criteria. You will receive a copy of the report the QAM makes to us. If there are problems in your quality assurance systems, your QAM will clearly identify what the problems are and will advise you on how to tackle them. If the problems are serious, and are in danger of compromising candidate achievement, the QAM will recommend an Action Plan detailing what needs to be done and laying down strict timescales for you to adhere to. We will provide advice and support during this time. If you cannot carry out the required action in the agreed timescale, we reserve the right to remove SQA approval from your centre.

Our external verification process samples candidate achievement in a variety of ways. If you are offering SVQs, you will receive visits from External Verifiers including a free development visit six months after obtaining your first specific qualification approval. (This method is also used when candidate evidence from our National Qualifications is not suitable for central verification.) You will receive a copy of the report made by the External Verifier to SQA. Should problems be encountered, we will not be able to certificate your candidates until these have been rectified. We will monitor reports made by External Verifiers to

check whether overall quality assurance issues are arising — if they are, this may prompt a visit from your QAM. We do not charge you for visits from our QAMs and External Verifiers if we have initiated these.

If you need help, you can ask for a development visit from either a QAM or an External Verifier. We make a charge for such requested visits. Details of the current costs can be obtained by telephoning our Approval Team.

Further help and information

We aim to make the approval process as smooth as possible for you, and are ready to provide any help or advice you may need.

Our publication *Managing School-College Partnerships* may be of interest to schools and colleges. Please contact SQA's Approval Team if you wish to receive a copy or have any queries about the approval process.

After you have achieved approval to offer a specific qualification, we will monitor your progress in entering candidates for that qualification. If you do not enter candidates within six months of being approved, we may contact you to discuss what we can do to help you.

We reserve the right to remove approval to offer any specific qualification if a centre does not enter candidates for it or any other qualifications in the same verification group within twelve months of being approved.

External assessment

If you wish to offer a National Course which includes external assessment in the form of an examination, and you have not offered a National Course before, we ask you to notify us on the appropriate form, which can be obtained from SQA's Approval Team.

There are strict requirements for centres wishing to act as examination centres for the externally-assessed components of National Qualifications, such as Highers. These are fully covered in *Conditions and Arrangements for National Qualifications*.

Centres wishing to offer qualifications with an external assessment can enter candidates for those external examinations themselves or through another approved SQA centre, eg a school or college. If you are using another centre, we ask you to confirm that you have written evidence from this centre that they will accommodate your candidates.

If you wish to conduct external assessment on your own premises, we will need to carry out a separate approval process. We require systems to be in place and equipment to be available at the time of approval. This is because any irregularity

in the conduct of an external examination can have a serious impact on all candidates taking the examination, not just those in your centre.

In approving you to offer external examinations, we consider the examination room(s), supplementary facilities and equipment, staffing, and your procedures for dealing with secure storage and handling of examination papers and candidates' completed examination scripts. We ask centres to nominate invigilators, and we then appoint invigilators to your centre. We have strict criteria for eligibility to be an SQA invigilator.

Accommodation

You will be asked to state the maximum number of candidates you can accommodate for an examination, and show that your accommodation meets the following minimum criteria:

For each room to be used as an examination room:

- ◆ the floor is level, and there are no galleries
- ◆ there will be no material displayed on the walls at the time of the examination
- ◆ there are sufficient single desks or tables and chairs for the number of candidates stated, and these are consecutively numbered
- ◆ there is a minimum space of 1.25 metres between rows of desks, to minimise any chance of copying or collusion
- ◆ rooms for candidates taking practical tests are suitably equipped

Supplementary facilities and equipment

You should also show us that:

- ◆ lighting levels are appropriate
- ◆ heating and ventilation are appropriate, and can be controlled
- ◆ there is a working clock, clearly visible to all candidates
- ◆ there are blinds or other means of controlling sunlight through windows
- ◆ you have taken steps to avoid possible sources of extraneous noise, eg traffic noise, building noise, noisy processes in adjacent rooms, movement of large numbers of people past the examination room, telephone in the examination room
- ◆ there is access for disabled candidates to both the centre and the examination rooms
- ◆ there are toilet facilities for male and female candidates, and for candidates with disabilities

Staff

We will invite you to nominate invigilators for our examinations. We will appoint invigilators to your centre, and you will need one invigilator for every 35 candidates (or for every room, if they accommodate fewer than 35 candidates). We will appoint a Chief Invigilator: this person will have at least one year's experience of invigilation. Once we have informed you of the name of your Chief Invigilator, you will be responsible for ensuring that there is effective communication between the invigilator and your centre (see 'Management of information' below).

The following points, which are based on experience of previous examinations, should be noted:

- ◆ Normally SQA does not offer appointment to persons over 70 years of age. However, should you wish to nominate someone over 70 years of age or who may reach that age during the period of the contract, you may do so if you are satisfied that she/he is competent to carry out all the duties which the position entails.
- ◆ Persons nominated for appointment should be resident within a reasonable distance of the centre and in urban areas within easy reach of the centre. **Any departure from this must be cleared in advance with SQA.**
- ◆ No person directly connected with the centre (eg member of staff at the centre, officer of the Education Authority, other school manager, parent of a candidate) should be nominated. If, in **exceptional** circumstances, you require to use someone in these categories, approval must be sought from SQA.
- ◆ SQA should be contacted concerning any nominee who is being entered as a candidate at the same diet of examinations.
- ◆ Every precaution must be taken to ensure that persons nominated are entirely trustworthy and capable of carrying out all the duties that the position entails.
- ◆ Nominees should be of good education, alert and physically capable of carrying out the duties.
- ◆ Equal Opportunities legislation applies to the recruitment of Invigilators and so all reasonable steps must be taken to ensure that the letter and spirit of the legislation is followed in making these nominations.

In addition, you will need to have both male and female staff members in the centre to accompany candidates who need to leave the examination room during an examination, and a system for summoning them to the examination room when needed.

Management of information

As well as your systems for communicating registration and entry data about candidates to SQA, you will need to show us that you have systems in place to enable you to submit estimates of performance for each candidate and to make

formal appeals on candidate results in external examinations, backed by evidence from candidates' course work.

We will check your systems for distributing information on examination timetables and procedures to candidates, and for ensuring that they understand the criteria against which they will be assessed and the form of assessment to be used.

You will need to show us that there are clear lines of communication between the invigilator and the person in the centre responsible for the conduct of examinations, and procedures for the circulation of examination-related material from SQA and the distribution of stationery and equipment prior to the examination. There are specific requirements for individual examinations, which are detailed in our *Handbook for Invigilators*, and we need to be sure that candidates in your centre will receive the appropriate stationery and equipment for these examinations, eg protractors, A3 or square-ruled paper, atlases, and so on.

In addition, you will need to show us that you have secure overnight storage facilities in your centre for candidate scripts after the examination has taken place.

Further details can be obtained from the Approval Team.

Appendix: specific qualification approval checklist

This checklist is supplied to help you to ensure that you have filled in the sections of the form which are relevant to your application.

Please <i>tick the appropriate box</i> to show that you have filled in the relevant part of the form and attached additional documents, if needed.	Approval submission
COVER SHEET	
Centre name	
Centre number	
Name of main contact for this submission	
Telephone number of main contact	
Qualification title and code	
Type of application — appropriate box ticked on cover sheet	
Full list of documents included with your submission	
Declaration signed and dated (your submission will not be processed without this)	
PART A — SECTION 1	
Full title of qualification	
Level of qualification	
Qualification code	
Unit code(s) and full Unit title(s)	
PART A — SECTION 2	
Details of previous experience of assessment in this qualification area	
PART A — SECTION 3	
Resources	
Assessment material for NQs	
Assessment materials for HNQs/SVQs	
Details of internal verification for this qualification	
List of verifiers/assessors for this qualification	
List of sites (if applicable)	
Site selection checklist appended if not already sent to SQA	
Staff qualification information	
PART B — SECTION 2	
Qualification validation information	
PART B — SECTION 3	
Qualification structure	