National Qualifications 2015
Internal Assessment Report
Core Skills: Communication

The purpose of this report is to provide feedback to centres on verification in National Qualifications in this subject.

National Qualifications (NQ) Units

F3GB 08 Communication (40 hours)

♦ F3GM 08 (Listening, 10 hours)
♦ F3GN 08 (Reading, 10 hours)
♦ F3GP 08, (Speaking, 10 hours)
♦ F3GR 08 (Writing, 10 hours)

F3GB 09 Communication (40 hours)

♦ F3GM 09 (Listening, 10 hours)
♦ F3GN 09 (Reading, 10 hours)
♦ F3GP 09, (Speaking, 10 hours)
♦ F3GR 09 (Writing, 10 hours)

F3GB 10 Communication (40 hours)
F3GB 11 Communication (40 hours)
F3GB 12 Communication (40 hours)

General comments

Centres have a sound understanding of the requirements of the national standards in NQ Core Skills Communication.

Most educational centres continue to develop their own materials, sometimes prior verified, and usually based on the current SQA assessment support packs (ASPs). The ASP checklists have proved effective in ensuring assessment is matched to specification requirements.

Some centres (usually community based) are making good use of the 'bite-sized' Communication Units to develop skills and build confidence. This is normally allied to high-quality, learner-centred practice.

Many centres incorporate Communication assessment with other Core Skills, in particular ICT. There is extensive evidence of effective contextualisation and vocationally specific approaches.

Unit specifications, instruments of assessment and exemplification materials

All centres visited in the last session were familiar with current Unit specifications and ASP exemplification. The assessment checklists from the ASPs are widely in use, or used as templates to accompany centre-devised materials and approaches.

Evidence Requirements

Evidence required for Writing was clearly understood. Evidence for Reading, which can be offered either in writing or orally, is usually supplied in writing. Spoken tasks are sometimes less well evidenced than the others. If evidence is in the form of an observer checklist, this must be detailed, with close reference to the general and specific skills being assessed. For Speaking/Listening tasks there should also be a description of context and task remit. The duration of Speaking/Listening events must be noted. A recorded sample of spoken work, witnessed and documented by more than one assessor, is desirable for purposes of internal and external verification.

Administration of assessments

Internal verification presents a considerable challenge in large centres operating across several locations. Increasingly, multi-location centres are holding online master folders, to which all assessors have access. The organisation of such folders varies considerably from one centre to another. Systems of recording internal verification feedback and required actions are usually clear, though online documentation can sometimes mean signatures and/or authority for decisions are not obvious. In some newly merged centres, internal verification systems and processes are new, with some 'teething problems'.

In assessing writing, centres often retain at least one draft as well as the final document. This is useful to support authentication. Assessor feedback on the first draft can also demonstrate a supportive approach to redrafting. However, there is a key difference between support and assistance. Assessors can and should redirect the learner to areas of weakness; specific 'correction' is not allowable.

Sometimes learners, usually in a community-based setting, are assessed at a skill level lower than their capability. This approach is acceptable where confidence building is the chief objective and where the approach has been agreed with the learner in advance. However, candidates should receive feedback explaining, where appropriate, that they have both met and exceeded evidence requirements, and should be encouraged to progress to the next level. When evidence of this kind is presented for external verification, assessors should formally note the rationale for assessing or awarding at the lower level.

Areas of good practice

These included:

♦ Electronic master folders accessible to all assessors containing all essential policy documents, assessment materials, etc
♦ Robust internal verification systems, often operating successfully across several locations
♦ Diarised records of standardisation discussion, with key points highlighted and actions recorded
♦ Integrative approaches, across two or more Core Skills, or across Core Skills and vocational Units

- Centre-devised assessments based on the SQA ASPs but geared to the personal, social, educational or vocational needs of the learner
- Detailed assessor observation comments on spoken tasks, with some interactions audio- or video-recorded
- Personalised approaches to learning and assessment
- Clear evidence of 'learner journey', in terms of planning documents and first drafts retained

Specific areas for improvement

- Signatures authorising assessment decisions, or internal verifier actions, should be clearly legible
- Action points noted by internal verifiers should include dates for completion and notes on follow-up
- Centres should feel confident in developing their own up-to-date Communication tasks suited to the personal, social, educational or vocational needs of their learners
- All instruments of assessment for Reading at levels 4–6 should include a brief marking scheme similar to those exemplified in the ASPs
- The evaluative element of Reading tasks is sometimes poorly evidenced, especially at levels 5 and 6
- Careful consideration should be given to methods of evidencing and internally verifying Speaking/Listening tasks. Unless a recording has been made, assessors must complete observation checklists in considerable detail, and retain learner planning notes, etc
- Duration of Speaking/Listening tasks should be noted and comply with the minimum requirement
- The word length for writing tasks should be noted and comply with minimum requirements. Retaining a formative draft is helpful to support authentication
- Assessor feedback on written work should not include specific 'correction', though it can and should redirect candidates to areas that require strengthening in order to meet the standard