



**National Qualifications 2016
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

Titles/levels of NQ units verified:

Communication F3GB 08 (40 hours)

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

Communication F3GB 09 (40 hours)

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

Communication F3GB 10 (40 hours)

Communication F3GB 11 (40 hours)

Communication F3GB 12 (40 hours)

General comments

Current Communication units have been in use since 2009 and are unaffected by the changes introduced through the new National 1 to 5 qualifications. Most centres, therefore, have a sound understanding of unit requirements, informed by experience.

College mergers have presented some centres with new challenges in terms of standardising approaches and materials. Often Communication is taught across several campuses at considerable distance from one another. Teams may be large and face-to-face meetings hard to schedule. Different centres have tackled internal verification in different ways: the task has been complex and is ongoing. External verifiers praised progress in establishing common standards and approaches. In some centres, however, regular standardisation remains an issue and this was flagged by external verifiers.

New material has been developed in many of the merged centres, sometimes using the prior verification service. SQA development visits have proved helpful in moving things forward. The assessment support pack (ASP) checklists continue to prove effective in ensuring assessment is matched to specification requirements.

Some centres incorporate Communication with other Core Skills in imaginative project-based approaches. Most centres use contextualised material effectively.

Unit specifications, instruments of assessment and exemplification materials

Evidence requirements

Reading

Reading tasks are mainly contextualised and relevant to learners. In some cases, texts in use need to be refreshed. External verifiers reported on some that were up to seven years old and therefore not good practice in terms of currency. This applies to some texts in the SQA ASPs too, which are provided as examples of appropriate material but are now several years old. Centres are encouraged to develop their own Reading materials and incorporate new texts regularly. Some centres use SQA's prior verification service to help with this.

The length of texts used to assess Reading can vary dramatically, even inside one centre. There may be justification for this where Communication assessment is integrated with another unit. However, in general, different Reading assessments at the same level should present a similar challenge in terms of length. We suggest the Reading text, at each level, should be at least as long as the minimum word count for Writing, plus up to 300 words. So for level 5, for example, the expected length of Reading text might be 500–800 words.

Writing

Evidence required for Writing is clearly understood at all levels and supplied using a wide range of materials. Portfolio approaches are successfully used in some cases to meet the minimum word count. Centres must, however, ensure that one piece in a portfolio is substantive (eg 300 words for level 5, plus other documents totalling a further 200). Purpose and audience should be clear for all Writing tasks.

Where 'naturally occurring' evidence is used for Writing, the assessor must ensure sufficient evidence is retained to show that each learner has achieved all the bullet-pointed requirements listed in the unit (eg evidence of purpose and intended reader, so that format and style can be assessed in relation to these).

Speaking and Listening

Speaking and Listening tasks are often less well evidenced than the others. Where observer checklists are the only record of achievement, they must incorporate significant detail, with close reference to the general and specific skills being assessed. 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 good practice for purposes of internal standardisation and external verification.

New SQA exemplification of Speaking and Listening tasks at levels 3–6, including recordings, checklists and commentaries, will be published later this year.

Administration of assessments

Assessment is mainly carried out under appropriate controlled conditions. However, some centres had imposed exam-type time constraints on Reading assessment, as a result of confusion over the following statement from the unit specifications:

'Learners must prove that they can do the whole of the activity at one time. They should not gather evidence from different situations for different parts of the activity.'

There is no time constraint for Reading assessment, but evidence must all be gathered from the same task — in this case, the responses to a single document. It would not be acceptable, for example, to gather evidence of evaluation from the response to one document, and evidence of summarising main ideas from the response to another. So *'at one time'*, in this context, means *'in one task'* or *'in one Reading assignment'*.

Where responses to Reading tasks are written, and minor remediation is required, some oral supplementation is acceptable but responses should be fully noted by the assessor, signed and dated.

Increasingly, external verifiers are reporting use of software such as Turnitin for checks on plagiarism. All centres visited this year had policies in place to address the issue of authenticity. For Communication, this is most likely to be a concern in Writing tasks. Many learners sign an 'Own Work' statement when submitting final drafts of written work.

Retentions of at least one draft of written work are useful to support authentication. Assessor feedback on the first draft also gives a useful insight into the drafting process. However, centres should note the key difference between support and assistance. Assessors can and should redirect the learner to areas of weakness; specific 'correction' will invalidate the evidence.

During external verifier visits, learners remarked appreciatively about linked assessment and contextualisation.

In some cases, candidates had presented written documents far longer than the minimum requirement for the level. This could be the result of integrated assessment. However, centres should be aware that learners should not be disadvantaged by having to do too much. It is not appropriate to assess only the first 500 or 700 words of a document.

Areas of good practice

These included:

- ◆ clear and helpful internal verification systems, systematically applied
- ◆ comprehensive master files, either electronic or paper-based

- ◆ detailed records of standardisation practice: not just meetings, but practical exercises in group assessment held during development days or similar
- ◆ new materials, contextualised or fully relevant to the learner and internally verified
- ◆ some video recording of Speaking and Listening performance used in standardisation discussion
- ◆ individualised and learner-centred approaches to teaching and learning, especially evident at levels 2 and 3
- ◆ supportive and constructive feedback to learners on assessed work
- ◆ linked tasks, in some cases, that allowed all three Communication skills to be evidenced in a connected and meaningful way
- ◆ close and supportive relationships between internal verifiers and assessors, both in sampling and in development of materials

Specific areas for improvement

Assessor and internal verifier signatures continue to be an issue for external verifiers — these are impossible to read. This can mean it is hard to be sure who authorised certain documents. Where signatures are cryptic, the person's name should also be printed or typed.

Maintaining currency for reading texts is an issue for some centres and a policy of bringing in newer texts on a regular basis should be adopted.

All instruments of assessment for Reading at levels 4-6 should include a brief marking scheme (for exemplification, see ASPs held in the secure area of the SQA website).

Careful consideration should be given to evidencing and internally-verifying Speaking/Listening tasks. Unless a recording has been made, assessors must complete observation checklists in detail, and retain learner planning notes etc. Purpose and audience must be specified.

Duration of Speaking and Listening tasks should be noted in all cases and comply with the minimum requirement. Instructions to learners should make clear what minimum length is expected.

The word length for Writing tasks should be noted and comply with minimum requirements. Retaining a formative draft is helpful.

There is still some evidence of direct 'correction' of written work. This invalidates assessment. Assessors can and should redirect candidates to areas that require attention by, for example, suggesting they check punctuation in certain paragraphs, or check for regular spelling errors. Assessors must not directly correct spelling, punctuation, grammar, phrasing etc.

Separate tasks should be set for each level to make clear the skill demands of that level. It is possible, however, for performance (in Writing, or Speaking and Listening) to meet the requirements for a higher level than the task anticipated. This is a matter of professional judgement and needs to be fully supported by detailed assessor comment matched to the specific skills of the relevant specification.

Records of standardisation practice are an SQA requirement. Where centres are unable to arrange regular standardisation meetings, other methods must be found to ensure common agreement on standards, and this process must be documented. Such methods might include Skype meetings, discussion board exchanges, and cross-marking. Records of standardisation could be in the form of minutes, diary notes, e-mails, recordings etc, and should be available to all assessors, and to external verifiers.