



NQ Verification 2013–14

Key Message Reports

Verification group name:	All
Levels	N3-N5
Date published:	August 2014

This Report combines all Verification Key Messages for the academic session 2013-14.



NQ Verification 2013–14

Key Messages, Round 1

Following the conclusion of external verification events for Round 1, which concluded on 20 December 2013, the following Verification Key Messages have been identified. The opportunity to communicate these messages in the middle of the academic session is a feature of our new approach to Quality Assurance and we hope that they will support centre managers and staff involved in the delivery and assessment of the new National Qualifications. Some of these messages will be of particular interest to those staff who are preparing to submit assessment evidence for verification in a later round.

The conclusion of the first round of verification gives us a comprehensive picture of areas where things are going well and highlights areas where further support or clarification will be helpful. The first round of verification involved 73 planned events at which we verified a range of valid, reliable assessment practices and associated judgements. There was clear evidence in many subjects and in many centres of a sound understanding of the standards and good assessment practices, also some cases of innovative practice. In some subject areas we saw a higher number of 'not accepted' outcomes than others, we are clear as to the reasons why and we are providing a wide range of support for centres.

SQA intends to help local authorities and teachers/lecturers with their understanding of standards and assessment practice in a number of ways:

- ◆ All centres which were selected for QA in Round 1 will receive a confidential report containing information about their approach to assessment, their assessment judgements, the effectiveness of internal QA, and identification of any specific areas of good practice.
- ◆ General and subject-specific Key Messages from the first round of verification will be published on our website. This will ensure that centres which were not verified in Round 1 benefit from this feedback to inform their practice.
- ◆ Subject-specific exemplification standardisation materials used by the Principal Verifiers to train and standardise nominees as part of the QA and/or alternative additional supporting materials will be published on SQA's secure site. These will be designed for use locally to help teachers and lecturers understand the standards required — it is important that time is allocated to do this.
- ◆ There will also be some clarification/amendment of assessment materials in a small number of subjects in light of what we have seen through QA. This could include aspects such as clarity on whether an assessment should be open or closed book (where that has been an issue) and also that it is acceptable to use marks where this has been an issue in a specific subject — as long as Assessment Standards are met — also where appropriate,

elimination of the requirement to duplicate the assessment of skills (eg in National 3 and National 4 Modern Languages).

Our verification teams are aware that key messages are being published at the same time as assessment evidence is being prepared for the next round of verification, and that some staff may not have an opportunity to react to the messages before assessment evidence is uplifted for Round 2. This is a feature of the timing between rounds of verification this year and our desire to get information to centres as quickly as possible to inform future practices.

It is important to remember that our approach to external verification for the new National Qualifications is a supportive and developmental process. Verifiers will highlight good practice, as well as provide detailed and constructive advice, recommendations and actions in verification reports with the aim of providing as much support as possible to assist centres with the assessment of these new qualifications.

Section 1: Verification group information

Verification group name:	All
Verification event/visiting information	Events
Date published:	January 2014

National Courses/Units/ verified:

The following generic key messages have been identified following the Round 1 verification activity.

Section 2: Comments on assessment (approaches and judgements)

Unit assessment support packs and centre-produced assessments

Across subjects, centres mainly used SQA-produced Unit assessment support packs (UASPs) and made appropriate and relevant use of these.

SQA Unit Specifications have been designed to be open and flexible and give you discretion to decide the most appropriate methods or instrument of assessment. You can use your professional judgement to decide whether or not the assessment evidence from candidates meets the standards specified in the Unit Specification. However, in all cases you must use a valid assessment and ensure that it is reliably marked/assessed.

For each Course, SQA has provided three Unit assessment support packs to complement a range of teaching and learning approaches; for example, Unit-by-Unit, Combined and Portfolio approaches. These packs have all been designed to assess Unit competence on a Pass/Fail basis and, rather than using a global threshold score or a cut-off score, describe how assessment evidence is to be judged against each Assessment Standard.

Other than for the National 4 Added Value Unit assessment, there are a number of ways in which SQA Unit assessment requirements can be met. For example, by using SQA-produced Unit assessment support packs, using published prior verified centre-produced Unit assessments or by using your own material that has been successfully submitted to SQA for prior verification.

Some centres did produce their own assessment tasks or revised the SQA-produced Unit assessment support packs. In the main, these were well designed, practical and more than adequately allowed candidates to meet the assessment standards. In some cases they showed innovative approaches to assessment. Centres are to be commended for this and SQA encourages centres to give permission for SQA to publish these materials, anonymously, to enable sharing of these approaches with other centres. However, a number of assessments were submitted which did not meet the Assessment Standards. They were judged to

be not valid and the verification outcome was 'not accepted'. These assessments had not been prior verified.

Some centres used centre-produced tasks which exceeded the minimum requirements to meet Assessment Standards. This results in candidates being over-assessed, which is not necessary and likely to disadvantage candidates.

Centre staff are reminded that all assessments must be checked to ensure their validity before they are taken by candidates. Internal quality assurance procedures must ensure that all assessors have a common understanding of the standards required. Meetings between assessors to discuss the planned assessment will help to standardise interpretation and understanding of assessment standards. Whilst we appreciate that this might take some time to do, it is likely to save more time later in the assessment process.

Appendix 1 in each Unit assessment support pack has been designed to be detached and given to candidates. The context given in the appendix may be adapted to suit your candidates or modified to be made more relevant to your candidates. If this results in an assessment task of the same level of demand/difficulty and you follow the advice in the pack, particularly in judging evidence, this is considered a minor change and does not require prior verification.

Centres should make use of SQA's prior verification service where significant changes are made to the Unit assessment support packs, or for centre-devised assessments. Further information on SQA's prior verification service is available on the [Delivery Processes section of our website](#).

Any assessments submitted for prior verification should have been internally quality assured by centre staff beforehand.

SQA strongly recommends that you submit significantly changed assessments for prior verification before you use them for assessment purposes. This is a free service from SQA and, if you give permission, we will publish these assessments on our secure website on an anonymised basis.

Making assessment judgements

On the whole, across subjects, there was evidence that centres were mostly making consistent and secure assessment judgements. However, centres are reminded that care should be taken when making assessment judgements in relation to command words. For example, when the command words '**describe**' and '**explain**' were used within an assessment and a good description was given, this, on occasion, was judged a pass at National 5 when an explanation was actually required.

Using marks within assessment tasks

The basis of assessment in the Units is Pass/Fail. The allocation of marks is not required and may be unhelpful to the candidate, especially when marks are not closely aligned to Assessment Standards.

Where centres used marks and indicated a pass mark, centres must ensure that the pass mark allocated covers the minimum standard to pass an Assessment Standard.

The judging evidence tables in the SQA-produced Unit assessment support packs describe how the Outcomes/Assessment Standards can be met. Assessment judgements have to be made against each Assessment Standard. Judging evidence may involve assessing the degree of accuracy, relevance or the number of correct responses in the evidence and, if desired, marks can be used to assist in this process. Where centres use marks, there is a need to indicate clearly how the marks allocated translate into attainment in all of the Assessment Standards.

The wider use of marks in setting global Unit threshold scores, cut-off scores or pass marks, does not meet requirements as it does not demonstrate competence in all the Assessment Standards covered by the assessment.

Demonstrating Assessment Standards have been met

For some assessment tasks it is good practice to capture candidate evidence in video or audio recordings. These recordings should be accompanied by a candidate assessment record or equivalent document which shows the basis on which the judgements were made. This is particularly useful for External Verifiers to help them understand the assessment process. They can then give more detailed advice and guidance in their verification reports. It is also important that candidates should be easily identifiable in all audio/visual evidence.

In judging assessment evidence, SQA's main focus is to ensure Assessment Standards are met and all work presented for assessment is genuinely the candidates' own work. Unless stated in the Unit Specification, there are no restrictions on assessment conditions, eg time, open/closed book, and methods/instruments of assessment. SQA-produced Unit assessment support packs may, however, prescribe assessment conditions.

In many cases a complete Unit can be assessed using a single assessment task or piece of evidence (as illustrated in Unit-by-Unit approach). In other cases, a larger assessment or series of assessments can be used to assess more than one Unit concurrently (as illustrated in a Combined approach). In gathering and assessing evidence over a period of time (as illustrated in a Portfolio approach), a single piece of evidence can demonstrate that a candidate has met a number of Outcomes/Assessment Standards.

The purpose of SQA external verification is to ensure that appropriate Unit assessment decisions have been made and to provide support in how to meet SQA requirements. To allow SQA External Verifiers to make an informed decision, you must show how you have marked/judged candidate work against SQA requirements. Advice on the type of evidence that should be retained for external verification quality assurance is given on each subject web page. All SQA internal assessments must be internally verified by centres.

Section 3: General comments

Internal quality assurance

There were many examples of good practice with respect to internal quality assurance processes.

Centres are reminded that if they are offering SQA qualifications, they must have an effective internal quality assurance system which ensures that all candidates are assessed accurately, fairly and consistently to national standards.

Following the first round of verification, our advice is that to maximise the opportunities offered by the new approaches to Unit assessments, assessors should not lose sight of the purpose of the broader Unit Outcomes by overly focusing on, and breaking down, each Assessment Standard. This can lead to over-assessment. Rather, they should look for opportunities where a piece of assessment evidence can be used to satisfy several Assessment Standards.

It is good practice to include a note of explanation regarding the internal quality assurance policies and procedures used. Further information about internal verification is available on our [website](#).

Submitting evidence for verification

Centres are reminded that they should submit the following evidence for external verification:

1. Evidence of the centre's internal quality assurance processes.
2. Details entered on the verification sample form and candidate evidence flyleaf, and on the centre's candidate assessment record or equivalent.
3. The assessment or other stimulus that generated the judged candidate evidence.
4. The candidate's evidence with the assessment judgements.

Before submitting evidence for external verification, centres should ensure that they have referred to the guidance documents. Guidance on evidence required for external verification of Units and internally-assessed Components of Course assessment is provided on our Quality Assurance web page (www.sqa.org.uk/cfeqa).

Looking ahead...

SQA-produced Unit assessment support packs have been designed to assess Unit competence on a Pass/Fail basis. National 5 Course assessment focuses on the added value of the Course, which goes beyond the standards required for Unit assessment. You need to give careful consideration to how you prepare your candidates for Course assessment (which needs to be based on the National 5 Course Specification; Course Assessment Specification; Specimen Question Papers and Coursework information).

Similarly, you need to give careful consideration to how you prepare your National 4 candidates for the Added Value Unit assessment (which needs to be based on the National 4 Course Specification and Added Value Unit

Specification). For the first two sessions of the new qualifications (ie in sessions 2013–14 and 2014–15) you must use the SQA-produced National 4 Added Value Unit assessment. During this time you must use the assessment method, assessment conditions and judging evidence tables provided. However, there is some flexibility in choosing the topic, and activity for brief for the Added Value Unit assessment. Subject-specific advice is given on each National 4 subject web page.

A copy of the CfE Update letter issued in September can be found on each [subject web page](#).

Detailed guidance on our prior verification service is available from our [Delivery Processes web page](#).



NQ Verification 2013–14

Key Messages Round 2

01

Section 1: Verification group information

Verification group name:	All
Verification event/visiting information	Events
Date published:	March 2014

National Courses/Units/Awards verified:

The following generic key messages have been identified following Round 2 verification activity.

02

Section 2: Comments on assessment

Assessment approaches

A broad variety of assessment approaches was once again displayed in centre samples, including both SQA and centre-produced tasks. This variety in approach to assessment is to be encouraged as it helps to give candidates the opportunity to achieve the standards in a way that they can comfortably respond to.

Centres should take care when producing tasks/assessments to ensure that **all** Assessment Standards are covered and that minimum requirements are not exceeded, which would result in candidates being over-assessed.

Centres are encouraged to make use of SQA's prior verification service where significant changes are made to the Unit assessment support packs, or for centre-produced assessments. Further information on SQA's prior verification service is located on the website.

www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/63004.html

Any assessments submitted for prior verification should have been internally quality-assured by centre staff beforehand. Prior verification is a free service from SQA and, if you give permission, we may publish these assessments on our secure website on an anonymised basis to provide centres with additional examples of approved assessment approaches.

Assessment judgements

The majority of centres were clearly applying the standards to the assessments and had a sound knowledge of the new system and assessment procedures, for which they are to be commended.

In a number of submissions, there was an absence of information about how assessment judgements had been made. Centres should ensure they provide some form of evidence as to how assessment judgements were made in relation to the separate Assessment Standards as this is vital to decision-making during the verification process.

Practical work

There were a number of instances of lack of detail for individual candidates for assessments which involved group work. When undertaking practical work, candidates may be able to work in groups. However, assessors should ensure that every candidate is actively involved in the planning of the work and that each candidate records their own results/progress. The level of support provided should be in line with the guidance provided in the Unit assessment support packs.

03

Section 3: General comments

Internal verification

A large number of centres provided excellent evidence of very thorough internal verification procedures. This is commendable and represents a notable improvement on Round 1. Examples of internal verification processes that were seen included cross-marking, blind marking, and comparing and sampling.

Centres must have effective internal quality assurance systems in place to offer SQA qualifications and information on the process associated with the new NQs should be included with submissions for verification.

[Internal Verification: A Guide for Centres Offering SQA Qualifications](#)

Re-assessment

Where re-assessment was necessary, some centres had focused only on the Assessment Standards still to be achieved. This was appropriate and ensured that candidates would not be over-assessed.

Additional guidance

Centres are reminded that they should submit the following evidence for external verification:

- ◆ evidence of the centre's internal quality assurance processes
- ◆ details entered on the verification sample form and candidate evidence flyleaf, and on the centre's candidate assessment record or equivalent
- ◆ the assessment or other stimulus that generated the judged candidate evidence
- ◆ the candidate's evidence with the assessment judgements

Before submitting evidence for external verification, centres should ensure that they have referred to the guidance in the document *Evidence required for external verification of Units (including Added Value Units) at verification events* and/or the guidance on *Evidence for external verification of National 5 internally-assessed Components of Course assessment*.

[New NQ Quality Assurance Models](#)



NQ Verification 2013–14 Key Messages Round 3

01

Section 1: Verification group information

Verification group name:	All
Verification event/visiting information	Event
Date published:	August 2014

National Courses/Units verified:

The following generic key messages have been identified following Round 3 verification activity.

The approach to quality assurance of the new National Qualifications was modified for Round 3 verification. The focus for Round 3 was on Added Value Unit (AVU) assessments at National 4 and internally-assessed Components of Course assessment (IACCAs) at National 5.

02

Section 2: Comments on assessment

Assessment approaches

It is mandatory for centres to use the SQA approach in the Unit assessment support pack for the Added Value Unit in sessions 2013–14 and 2014–15.

In the majority of cases, centres were tackling the Added Value Unit effectively following the guidelines in the Unit assessment support pack.

Some centres had applied the advice on personalisation and choice clearly, and the topic agreed with the assessor incorporated the interests of the candidate and the requirements of the assignment where this was suitable.

Assessment judgements

When submitting evidence for verification, centres should provide a clear indication as to how assessment judgements have been made against the Assessment Standards. For example, some centres had helpfully provided detailed comments on an assessment checklist to show how judgements had been made, and how clear and relevant feedback to candidates on meeting the Assessment Standards had been recorded.

There were some examples of candidate evidence that exceeded the standard for National 4. Centres should decide on what meets the national standard and what does not. Care should be taken to ensure that the level of evidence required does not create a barrier to achievement for some learners.

There was evidence that assessors had made good use of the Detailed Marking Instructions to allocate marks. Some centres had used and included an annotated/highlighted copy of the Detailed Marking Instructions to show how marks were allocated to each candidate. This was in addition to the Candidate Assessment Record. The combination of the two approaches to recording the marking process proved excellent practice and provided verifiers with clear information.

03

Section 3: General comments

A variety of internal verification practices were seen. Some examples included: cross-marking, blind marking, and comparing and sampling. Centres are reminded that they must have effective internal quality assurance systems in place to offer SQA qualifications and information on the process associated with the new NQs should be included with submissions for verification.

There was evidence of good practice in carrying out and recording internal verification procedures. Where this was the case, the sample was clearly identified. Where there were comments made by the internal verifier, these related to the Detailed Marking Instructions for the National 5 IACCAs and to the Assessment Standards for National 4 AVUs.

The majority of centres had made good use of the checklists of evidence to be submitted for verification for AVUs and IACCAs, and all the required documentation had been included.

A few centres had submitted the wrong evidence for verification, eg the National 4 AVU when the National 5 IACCA had been requested and, vice-versa. Please ensure that you submit the evidence requested.

[Internal Verification: A Guide for Centres Offering SQA Qualifications](#)