



Guide to Visiting HN and Vocational Qualification Verification for Centres 2015–18

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Part A: Introduction

Qualification Verification is the process by which SQA ensures that centres are assessing their candidates in line with national standards, and that assessment decisions comply with SQA's Quality Assurance Criteria. Qualification Verifiers are experienced subject experts who are appointed by SQA to undertake visiting qualification verification on SQA's behalf.

This guidance has primarily been developed to support staff in SQA-approved centres that are receiving or are about to receive visiting Qualification Verification activity to quality assure Higher National (HN), Vocational Qualifications (VQ), Qualification and Credit Framework Units (QCF), Customised Awards (Cu), and National Qualifications other than National Courses (NQ).

Part B provides specific guidance on each quality assurance criterion for qualifications verification, including:

- ◆ the rationale for inclusion of the quality criterion in Qualification Verification
- ◆ specific SQA requirements relating to the criterion
- ◆ examples of types of evidence
- ◆ additional sources of information and guidance available from SQA

The Qualification Verifiers (QVs) will work from exactly the same guidance.

There are other quality assurance criteria which are only covered in Systems Verification. Systems verification is the process by which SQA ensures centres are managing their systems and resources to meet SQA's Quality Assurance Criteria. These criteria are not included in this guide, but the full criteria are available in the Quality Assurance section of the SQA website. Where there are gaps in the numbering of criteria in this document, this is because Systems Verification criteria have been excluded.

Sources of support

Contact Centre telephone number: 0303 333 0330

Source of support	Nature of support
Quality Assurance Logistics Officers Contact details: Tel: 0345 213 5928 E-mail: gav@sqa.org.uk	Issuing reports and receiving, logging, tracking and forwarding to QVs evidence to address Required Action points.
Regional Managers Contact details Email: mycentre@sqa.org.uk	First point of contact for specific centre queries

SQA's values

SQA's corporate values are:

- ◆ **Trusted** — We follow agreed procedures and are open and honest in our communications
- ◆ **Progressive** — We view new and unfamiliar approaches with an open mind, whilst ensuring quality is maintained
- ◆ **Enabling** — We work in partnership with SQA centres to achieve common goals of excellence and consistency

You can expect that Qualification Verifiers (QVs) will act in accordance with these values at all times in their dealings with you.

Planning qualification verification visits

QVs are allocated centres and qualifications that require qualifications verification visits. You will have a qualifications verification visit within the first year after gaining approval for a qualification, if you have candidates registered for it. Thereafter, allocations are made under an intelligence-led, risk-based model.

Once the QV receives the allocation from SQA, they will e-mail your SQA Co-ordinator to provide a brief introduction and inform you of the Units or Awards that they have been asked to verify (from a product list supplied by SQA).

The QV will ascertain, with your SQA Co-ordinator, whether there will be enough available evidence to make an informed verification decision by checking that there is evidence of sufficient assessment decisions having been made to warrant a visit.

Initial and ongoing contact should be with your centre's SQA Co-ordinator. The QV should not contact subject staff directly unless authorised to do so by the SQA Co-ordinator. Where this is the case, the SQA Co-ordinator must always be copied into e-mails to subject staff.

The QV should arrange a provisional date for the visit with your SQA Co-ordinator (when enough evidence will be available across the spread of qualifications that are being verified).

If your centre is not running the Units or Awards the QV has been allocated to verify, you should inform the QV of this and they will inform SQA.

At least six weeks before the agreed date of the visit, the QV will e-mail the SQA Co-ordinator to tell them which Units they have selected to verify.

The e-mail will include the Information Request form for Visiting Verification. The form asks for the names of assessors and internal verifiers and the Awards/Units they are assessing/verifying. It also asks for each candidate's SCN and stage of progression. You should complete and return this within two weeks of receipt.

The information you provide must cover all of the Units the QV has selected.

For HNs and NQs, you do not need to indicate whether an assessor or internal verifier is qualified or unqualified, but this information is required for regulated qualifications, including all SVQs.

To aid visit planning, the QV will send you a template entitled 'Information Request Form for Visiting Verification' to complete and return. You can, if you prefer, provide the information required in an alternative format.

At least two weeks before the visit date, the QV will:

- ◆ **select a candidate sample**
- ◆ **create and send a Visit Plan** with a covering e-mail where applicable, highlighting the candidate evidence they wish to sample on the completed Information Request Form (or centre-devised format)

In the visit plan, The QV will select assessors/verifiers/candidates for interview. It is generally best for interviews to be conducted face to face; but other types of formats such as tele- or video-conference and telephone interviews are also acceptable.

Observation of live assessment remains a sampling method that Qualification Verifiers can use. The QV will discuss this with you and make appropriate arrangements.

The QV will outline what they would like to cover during the course of their visit and give an indication as to the running order.

You may wish to provide evidence electronically (eg via e-portfolios, virtual learning environments) and the QV may be able to review some/all of the candidate evidence prior to the visit, in which case the QV may ask to be provided with secure access, for example by you providing them with ID and password for an agreed period of time.

The SQA Co-ordinator should ensure that parking is booked for the QV, if required and requested by the QV, and that the QV has information to enable them to find the site at which the visit will take place.

Information on sampling

The visit plan will also include the QV's rationale for sampling — stating the reasons for the range of evidence/assessors/verifiers they have selected.

The general purpose of Qualification Verification sampling is to confirm that centres are interpreting standards correctly and that they have in place internal verification and assessment systems that allow valid, reliable and fair assessment decisions to be made.

Qualification Verification is based on the management of quality assurance risk, so the sampling of an appropriate range of assessment and verification decisions is an important part of it. Unless candidate numbers are very small, the QV will rarely scrutinise all candidates' work on a single visit. Instead, they will select a sample of candidates' evidence. Please remember that it will be the Verifier, and not centre staff, who decides (prior to the visit) which candidates' evidence will be scrutinised.

The specific sampling approach for each centre will vary according to the needs of the centre and the type of qualifications being verified.

For VQs/QCF units, the QV must adhere strictly to any sampling requirements detailed in the Assessment Strategy. If there are no Assessment Strategy sampling requirements, the sampling should be proportionate to the overall number of candidates enrolled and the numbers of assessors/verifiers involved in assessment/verification.

The mnemonic **SAMPLED** has been used below to summarise the scope of what should be sampled over time whenever Qualification Verification takes place:

Selected Awards/Units as allocated by SQA and then chosen for sampling by the QV. This has a bearing on the size of sample the QV will choose – as do candidate numbers per Award/Unit.

Assessment and verification decisions and practice (all assessors and internal verifiers sampled and interviewed over time). New assessors and verifiers should be prioritised.

Methods/instruments (all assessment methods/instruments, ensuring the principles of validity, reliability, equitability and fairness are applied).

Problematic, revised and new Units/qualifications (factored into sampling when necessary).

Location: all assessment sites visited over time. The level of importance attached to conducting site visits largely depends on the type of Awards/Units being offered. It may be important to visit a construction site where VQ assessments are being carried out and where the health and safety of the environment/equipment and provision of resources is essential to the overall achievement; it might be less important to visit the office of a Management VQ candidate where the evidence required to fulfil qualification requirements is more to do with the extent of role responsibilities being performed rather than physical environment resources.

Evidence of candidates being assessed for the Awards/Units selected, sampled through review of evidence records, supported with interviews (where appropriate).

Documented evidence of required procedures being followed.

Candidate evidence retention for sampling purposes

SQA's candidate evidence retention requirement provides Qualification Verifiers with an opportunity to sample a centre's past completed assessment evidence where there is no or limited availability of current ongoing assessment evidence.

SQA requires centres to retain all candidate evidence for the Group Award/Units until at least three weeks after the official completion date (the completion date provided by the centre to SQA). However, if the first contact for the session is made by the Qualification Verifier before three weeks after the completion date, **all** candidate evidence must be retained until after the verification visit has taken place.

Documentary evidence

The QV will inform you in the visit plan of the standard documentation that you should supply. This information includes:

- ◆ Assessment standards / Unit specifications.
- ◆ Assessment Methods / Instruments.
- ◆ Assessment decisions / Candidate evidence.
- ◆ Assessor standardisation arrangements.
- ◆ Assessment and Internal verification procedures and practice.
- ◆ Reviews of accommodation, equipment and learning and assessment materials.
- ◆ Records relating to candidate development needs.

In addition, for VQs/QCF Units, centres are asked for the following to be made available for inspection during the visit:

- ◆ Records of Assessor and Internal Verifier qualifications and experience.
- ◆ Adherence to Assessment Strategies.
- ◆ Continual Professional Development.

Evidence may be in the form of electronic files rather than paper documentation. You are not required to print out evidence, unless absolutely necessary.

Conduct and output of QV visits

At the beginning of a visit the QV will discuss and agree with you the agenda for the day.

This scene-setting opportunity also gives you an opportunity to discuss any issues you might have before the verification visit gets under way, and to explain the arrangements you have put in place in relation to:

- ◆ the sites/locations to be visited
- ◆ the sampling of evidence — accessibility and location (rooms)
- ◆ availability of assessors, internal verifiers and candidates for interview
- ◆ access to, procedures and records of implementation
- ◆ observation of live assessments (if applicable in relation to assessment strategy)
- ◆ domestic arrangements — location of fire exits and toilets, lunch arrangements
- ◆ who will be available at the end of the visit for feedback

It is recommended to QVs that they adopt the following approach when agreeing the running order with you. That is:

- ◆ **Procedures** sampling, such as those relating to assessment and internal verification before reviewing evidence as this enables them to consider how procedures are being implemented (this should be evident when subsequently sampling practice).
- ◆ **Evidence** sampling prior to meeting staff and candidates to help put discussions into context.
- ◆ **Decisions** of assessors and verifiers (logically sampled alongside evidence).
- ◆ **Discussions** with assessors, verifiers and candidates.

Sampling activities

Sampling of incomplete Unit evidence

SQA's guidance states that there should be enough evidence available to enable the Qualification Verifier to make an informed decision and for centres to gain enough valuable feedback on the assessment of the standards/Outcomes.

This means that centres do not have to have completed Units, although some completed Units are desirable as part of the sampling mix.

Verifying evidence that is not yet internally verified

It is not essential for the Qualification Verifier to sample internal verification decisions on completed Units on each visit to a centre. However, it is important that where verification decisions on completed Units are available, those decisions are sampled.

Where verification on completed Units is not available, evidence of planned and/or ongoing verification must be sampled. These verification activities are included in the three phases of verification described below.

Three phases of internal verification

SQA promotes a three-phase model of internal verification, which means that there are a number of opportunities to sample different aspects of the verification process on each visit. Those phases are:

- ◆ before assessment
- ◆ during assessment
- ◆ after assessment

Before assessment — this includes checking/agreeing the interpretation of assessment materials and requirements and agreeing how assessment should proceed. This should naturally happen for new awards, and in some centres before a new qualification block/semester runs. Evidence supporting this phase may also include a verification schedule, strategy or plan showing proposed verification activities for various Awards/Units (plans may also be in relation to each assessor for VQs).

During assessment — this can be further categorised into ongoing and final verification.

Ongoing verification helps keep things on track and informs the internal verifier as to the quality of assessment coming through. This 'dipping-in' process helps identify where additional assessor support may be required. This phase is especially important where new Units are being offered and/or where assessors are assessing Units for the first time.

Final verification is related to checking the quality of final assessment decisions on completed Outcomes/Units.

After assessment — this encompasses the review and evaluation of the overall assessment process with a view to continuous improvement in relation to Awards/Units. This

will normally involve the review of previous assessment and verification decisions, processes and practices. Reviews will normally take account of views from verifiers (internal and external), candidates and employers.

Interviews with assessors/verifiers/candidates

Interviews with assessors and verifiers gives the Qualification Verifier a valuable insight into how assessment and verification takes place and allows them an opportunity to find out information that can't readily be found from looking at records of evidence and assessment. Example areas for discussion include:

- ◆ internal verification, assessor support, candidate induction
- ◆ how standardisation is achieved
- ◆ maintaining CPD
- ◆ ensuring access to assessment
- ◆ how the review process works

Interviewing candidates, individually or in groups, is valuable from the point of view of ascertaining the support they receive and how procedures are applied from their perspective. For all candidates, regardless of the type of qualification they are undertaking, interviews (face to face or by using technological means) should be an integral part of Qualification Verification.

Example areas for discussion include:

- ◆ frequency of contact
- ◆ induction to Group Awards/Units
- ◆ support and guidance provided
- ◆ communication of progress/achievement

Referencing evidence to standards

Referencing helps Qualification Verifiers navigate evidence efficiently, enabling verification to be carried out in a time effective way. In this respect, referencing should be clear, but not so detailed that the time spent on it is disproportionate in relation to other core assessment activities.

The degree and detail of referencing will largely depend on the approach taken by your centre — for example, the degree of holistic assessment taking place — and the quantity of evidence being referenced.

Assessments that are carried out holistically (assessment of activities that span a number of different Outcomes/Units) are encouraged by SQA as they can make the assessment process more meaningful for candidates and help avoid over-assessment. Refer to SQA's [Guide to Assessment](#), page 11.

The referencing of evidence spanning a number of Units/Outcomes can be more time-consuming as evidence is not distinctly covered on an individual Outcome/Unit basis. In this situation it is important that the referencing system shows clear tracking of evidence to each

specific Outcome/Unit so that assessors and internal/qualification verifiers can make efficient judgements.

For VQ/QCF Units: the centre must show how the evidence covers each component of the Unit Standard (normally broken into Units/Outcomes and sometimes further defined as evidence requirements, performance criteria and knowledge).

Referencing shows the link between evidence and assessment decisions, and therefore has benefits for candidates collecting evidence in terms of tracking their own progress and achievement. For assessors, referencing allows the tracking of evidence that has been assessed and accepted, aiding forward planning.

Referencing should be an agreed responsibility between assessor and candidate — there are no set rules about this. For VQ/QCF Units at higher levels, candidates normally take more responsibility for gathering and referencing their evidence. It is important that candidates are not overwhelmed with referencing responsibilities, as their main priority is that they have the necessary skills and knowledge to meet the standard being assessed.

Up-front evidence profiling can assist with the referencing process – ie stating in advance where within a file/portfolio evidence such as candidate reports and observation reports can be found. Where evidence profiling is used, checking is still required to ensure accurate referencing. Ultimately, the end responsibility for ensuring clear and accurate referencing to the standards lies with the assessor.

For VQ/QCF Units, evidence can also be left *in situ* rather than it all being placed in a portfolio. The same referencing principles apply — ensuring that the evidence can be successfully accessed and located.

Electronically recorded evidence

Evidence that has been recorded electronically (computer files/e-mail, etc) and includes candidate evidence such as answers to questions, digital audio/video recording files, personal accounts and professional discussion, must be subject to the same levels of security and access as hard-copy evidence. This helps ensure, but does not guarantee, that the evidence submitted remains the candidate's own work.

Many centres use electronic portfolios (e-Portfolios). Where this is the case, users (candidates, assessors and internal verifiers) are normally given personal identification codes which allow an appropriate level of individual access. This type of system allows each user's work to be recognised and traced — a distinct advantage when assessing and quality assuring evidence.

Centres using electronic evidence are not required to use e-Portfolios, but their use is recommended. In all circumstances, where electronic evidence is being used, centres must ensure the evidence submitted by candidates:

- ◆ **Is received securely by the appropriate designated centre staff.**
- ◆ Cannot be altered by others. Candidates must be able to protect/lock their evidence before they submit it.

- ◆ Is stored securely in a restricted access file throughout assessment and until the completion of the assessment and quality assurance processes.

As with conventional signatures, assessors and verifiers must be able to signify in a legitimate way that they have confirmed assessment/verification decisions. This could be done by the assessor/verifier using a code, ie using an appropriate password, PIN, electronic signature or symbol, or any combination of these. Whatever code is used, it must be secure and only be available for use by the assessor or verifier it belongs to, just as a hand-written signature would be.

If you can demonstrate the above requirements in your electronic system, Qualification Verifiers should not also require you to print off hard copies of assessment/verification records.

Feedback

Once the Qualification Verifier has conducted all planned verification activities they will be in a position to make a judgement in relation to each criterion. You will receive feedback on:

- ◆ your good practice
- ◆ recommendations
- ◆ required action points
- ◆ the sufficiency of your evidence

The QV will provide verbal feedback at the end of the visit to the SQA Co-ordinator and/or any other staff you choose to have present. You should ensure that this takes place in a dedicated quiet area. There should be nothing included in the final written report which you were not made aware of on the day of the visit.

The report will include a 'traffic light' rating for every criterion:

Green: Sufficient evidence — this means that the centre has provided evidence that fully meets the criterion (ie there are no Required Action points required)

Amber: Insufficient evidence — this means the centre can provide some evidence in support of the criterion, but it is not sufficient (ie there are Required Action points)

Red: Little or no evidence — this means that evidence provided by the centre falls well short of meeting the criterion (Required Action points will be set).

Some criteria have specific requirements that must be met in order to fully meet the criterion. In some cases, these apply only to systems in support of regulated qualifications accredited by SQA Accreditation or Ofqual (including all SVQs).

In other cases, the requirements expand on the criterion. If any of these requirements are not addressed, the rating for the criterion will be amber or red, and Required Actions will be set. If there are no specific requirements stated, the wording of the criterion provides all the necessary information.

The criteria have different impact levels, which are shown against every criterion in Part B.

Having made a decision in relation to each criterion, the QV should explain their decision to you along with the rationale for making it and, at the same time, communicate the systems verification outcome rating for each category, based on the evidence available. The rating for each category will be one of the items from this list:

- ◆ Significant strengths
 - ◆ Strengths outweigh weaknesses
 - ◆ Some strengths and some weaknesses
 - ◆ Weaknesses outweigh strengths *or*
 - ◆ Significant weaknesses
-
- ◆ **Recommendations** are made so that a centre can enhance its existing provision. They are not mandatory and you do not need to act upon them.
 - ◆ **Required Action points** must be acted upon and are given when a judgement has been made that there is insufficient evidence, little evidence or no evidence (Amber or Red).

Where the verification decisions result in your centre being given a required action in relation to a specific criterion, the required action should be communicated to you by the QV verbally and in writing for each criterion using a Summary of Agreed Actions Form. This should be signed by your SQA Co-ordinator or centre representative and the QV before the end of the visit. A copy of the Summary of Agreed Actions Form will be given to the SQA Co-ordinator or their representative and a copy held by the Qualification Verifier.

The report of the visit

The report should reflect the information that was communicated to you at the verbal feedback. The comments section relating to each criterion should include comments on the sources of evidence seen by the QV to justify their verification decision. Required Action points should never be altered or extended post-visit after feedback has been given and agreed. The actions should also be clear and specific, with an agreed date for achievement.

If Required Actions are set as a result of SQA Qualification Verification, an agreed timescale will be set for addressing these. Sanctions may be applied if you do not fully meet the action points within this timescale.

Where Required Actions have been identified, any sanctions in addition to an action plan will be discussed and standardised by quality assurance officers within SQA and advised to the centre in the report.

You should submit completed evidence for each Required Action point by the required date to qav@sqa.org.uk, rather than to the QV. This ensures that Required Actions can be tracked by SQA.

Extensions will only be granted in exceptional circumstances, which should be notified to SQA as soon as they are known.

If you submit incomplete or insufficient evidence to fully meet the Required Actions you may be given another opportunity to submit, but risk ratings may be increased and sanctions applied if you do not address the action plan fully.

SQA will notify you of any further action required, or to confirm that the action point has been fully met by the evidence submitted and closed off.

You should contact qav@sqa.org.uk if you want to query anything in the report.

Feedback on the visit

Your SQA Co-ordinator will be sent a link to a Centre Feedback form along with the report of the visit. Please take the time to complete this feedback and send it back to SQA, as it will provide the verifier with valuable information to confirm that their verification practice is effective or to make future improvements and help us to further improve our quality assurance processes.

Appeals

If you disagree with SQA's decision on the outcome of Qualifications Verification, required actions and/or sanctions placed as a result, you can appeal.

Appeals may only be submitted by your Head of Centre, or his/her representative, who should first contact the Head of HN/Vocational Qualification Delivery, within 10 working days of receipt of the written report to agree a time to discuss the matter. If, after this discussion, the Head of Centre is not satisfied, an appeal can be raised.

The appeal should be submitted to the Director of Operations at the Corporate Office at SQA's Glasgow office. It should be submitted in writing, clearly marked as an appeal, by the Head of Centre within 15 working days of the date of the discussion with the SQA manager.

The appeal must include a written account of why the Head of Centre thinks that SQA's decision is wrong, and this account must address the reasons given by SQA. The evidence that is submitted in support of the appeal must be relevant to the case being made.

See *The Appeals Process: information for centres* (publication code FF5480).

Part B: Qualification Verification Criteria

Category 2: Resource management The centre procedures for managing resources must be documented, implemented and monitored to meet SQA requirements.	
Criterion 2.1	Assessors and internal verifiers must be competent to assess and internally verify, in line with the requirements of the qualification.
Awarding body requirements	<p>Assessors and internal verifiers must have the required up-to-date occupational experience and/or subject understanding, and, where stipulated, relevant qualifications and CPD. Where these requirements exist, they will be stipulated in one of the following: assessment strategy, unit specification, operational handbook, arrangements document/group award strategy document.</p> <p>Assessors and verifiers of regulated qualifications must achieve a relevant assessor/verifier qualification within 18 months of starting to practise where no alternative timescale is stated in an assessment strategy.</p> <p>Assessors and internal verifiers for regulated qualifications must undertake relevant continuing professional development activities, and keep records of this.</p>
Impact rating	High
Rationale for criterion inclusion	To ensure the validity and integrity of the qualifications offered by SQA, it is important that assessors/internal verifiers have the appropriate qualifications and occupational competence in relation to the qualifications they are assessing/verifying.
Support information	
Guidance on evidencing the criterion	<p>If there are no specific assessor verifier occupational/subject experience/CPD stipulated in Awarding/Regulatory Body documents, this criterion will be marked 'Not Verified' (NV).</p> <p>For regulated qualifications (S/NVQS and QCF Units), assessors and verifiers are not required to re-qualify if they already have relevant qualifications such as D32/33/A1/A2 Units/TQFE or D34/V1.</p> <p>All assessors/verifiers of regulated qualifications should, however, show they are 'working in line' with current national standards in assessment/verification. Refer to Additional sources of information for the guidance note from SQA Accreditation. Centres can use SQA's CPD</p>

	<p>Toolkit (optional) to help show assessors/verifiers are ‘working in line’. Refer to additional sources of information.</p> <p>QCF assessors/verifiers can either hold or work towards a nationally recognised assessor/verifier qualification. This is not a mandatory requirement unless specified in a QCF Unit Specification. Alternatively, competence in assessment or internal verification can be demonstrated by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ holding other qualifications that include relevant and sufficient assessment or verification components, or/and ◆ providing evidence of having successfully practised as an assessor and/or verifier of awarding organisation qualifications <p>Customised Awards: There are a number of options open to assessors/verifiers of these awards. For more information, refer to SQA’s Customised Awards Services.</p> <p>This SQA Quality Assurance Criterion will also be covered during Systems Verification, where policies and procedures will be checked.</p>
Examples of evidence	<p>Where a qualification requirement, records of relevant occupational/subject experience, CPD and qualifications.</p>
Additional sources of information	<p>The following guidance is available to centres:</p> <p>‘Assessor and Internal Verifier qualifications: a quick reference guide’</p> <p>SQA’s Accreditation Body Statement on Assessor and Verifier Competence.</p> <p>The National Occupational Standards for Learning and Development includes assessment and internal verification standards 9 and 11 on which Assessor/Verifier qualifications are based.</p> <p>This link provides guidance to centres on choosing an appropriate Assessor or Internal Verifier qualification.</p> <p>CPD Toolkit can be accessed on SQA’s Quality Assurance Appointee Website.</p>

Criterion 2.4	There must be evidence of initial and ongoing reviews of assessment environments; equipment; and reference, learning and assessment materials.
Awarding body requirements	Initial reviews must take place before the assessment of a qualification(s) begins to ensure all of the appropriate resources are in place. Ongoing reviews of resources are required thereafter to ensure resources continue to meet qualification requirements.
Impact rating	High
Rationale for criterion inclusion	Reviews are firstly important in ensuring resources appropriately meet qualification requirements. On a second level, reviews can aid quality improvement.
Support information	
Guidance on evidencing the criterion	Centres will differ in terms of how and when they carry out ongoing reviews. This may happen every time a new cohort of candidates commences a specific programme. For roll-on/off programmes, where individual candidate enrolment and certification is continuous, the review may be scheduled to happen eg annually. It is the Qualification Verifier's role to look at the evidence of review. Systems Verifiers will look at the procedures and mechanisms for managing reviews under a separate criterion (2.3).
Examples of evidence	Evidence of initial and ongoing reviews, which could include planned/scheduled reviews.
Additional sources of information	Review is mentioned in the first and second phases of the 'three phases of internal verification' in Part A of this guidance. Internal Verification Toolkit on the QA page of SQA's website.

Category 3: Candidate support

Candidates are supported and guided through the qualifications for which they are entered.

Criterion 3.2	Candidates' development needs and prior achievements (where appropriate) must be matched against the requirements of the award.
Awarding body requirements	In terms of prior achievement, candidates must meet any entry requirements and be in a position to be assessed in accordance with the relevant assessment strategy, unit specification, operational handbook, arrangements document/group award strategy document.
Impact rating	Medium
Rationale for criterion inclusion	Identifying development needs and prior achievement helps ensure a more targeted approach is taken in helping candidates achieve their qualifications.

Support information

Guidance on evidencing the criterion	<p>This criterion relates to identifying the prior achievements and development needs of candidates before or at the start of their Units/qualification.</p> <p>Prior achievements will include previously gained experience, knowledge, skills and/or qualifications.</p> <p>The identification of prior achievement at the commencement stage helps ensure that candidates satisfy any qualification entry requirements.</p> <p>The matching of needs is based on the knowledge/skills candidates already have in relation to the Units they are aiming to achieve. This ensures that candidates undertake a programme that is at an appropriate level, with relevant content.</p> <p>The result of the matching process could range from 'no/very little development required to 'significant development' required. 'No/very little development' can be appropriate for eg SVQ candidates who have enough experience to go straight to assessment for the majority of units they are enrolled for.</p> <p>In the case of taught programmes, such as those associated with HN and NQ Units and qualifications (this can also apply to some VQ programmes) the general development needs of candidates are usually matched against the award requirements at the programme/course design stage, and then factored into the learning, teaching and assessment plans.</p> <p>Centres are advised to document the identification and addressing of</p>
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	needs.
Examples of evidence	Record(s) showing candidates' prior achievements (where applicable) and development have been matched against qualification requirements.
Additional sources of information	The Guide to Assessment provides more information on formative assessment.

Criterion 3.3	Candidates must have scheduled contact with their assessor to review their progress and to revise their assessment plans accordingly.
Awarding body requirements	None in addition to the wording of the criterion.
Impact rating	Medium
Rationale for criterion inclusion	It is important that assessors maintain regular contact with candidates throughout the life of their qualification so that progression can be monitored and timely information and support provided.
Support information	
Guidance on verifying the criterion	<p>Maintaining contact is a key assessor responsibility, the purpose being to review candidate progress, provide necessary advice/support, and consequently revise assessment plans. This process could be in relation to Outcomes/Units/Evidence or/and in relation to the overall qualification.</p> <p>Contact should ensure candidates are clear in terms of their progress and in relation to where they are within the assessment process and what will be happening next.</p>
Examples of evidence	Any relevant documentation that shows progress reviews have taken place and assessment plans revised/updated.
Additional sources of information	Review is linked with the updating of assessment plans, which is an integral part of the assessor's role as defined in the Assessment Standard (9), given in the National Occupational Standards for Learning and Development .

Category 4: Internal assessment and verification

The centre's internal assessment and verification procedures must be documented, implemented and monitored to meet qualification and SQA requirements.

Criterion 4.2	Internal assessment and verification procedures must be implemented to ensure standardisation of assessment.
Awarding body requirements	None in addition to the wording of the criterion.
Impact rating	Medium
Rationale for criterion inclusion	This criterion is about assessors and verifiers applying their centre's assessment and verification procedures consistently.

Support information

Guidance on evidencing the criterion	<p>The Qualification Verifier will sample a range of assessment practice in relation to documented assessment procedures to measure consistency.</p> <p>The term 'assessment procedure' covers the assessment cycle and generally includes assessment planning/scheduling, judging evidence, re-assessment, recording assessment decisions, giving feedback, review.</p> <p>The term 'verification procedure' generally includes planning, sampling, making verification decisions, review.</p> <p>These procedures are included in National Occupational Standards — all assessors/verifiers of regulated qualifications should practise in line with those standards. Refer to Additional sources of evidence.</p> <p>Centres are required to document their assessment and verification policies and procedures. Systems verifiers will look at these written policies and procedures and whether they meet SQA requirements.</p> <p>The role of the Qualification Verifier is to focus on the centre's implementation of these policies/procedures. However, if the Qualification Verifier identifies any concerns about the content of a centre's Assessment/ IV policies or procedures, they will flag this up in their report so that the issue can be referred to a Systems Verifier to follow-up.</p> <p>There are some assessment procedures that are specific to particular qualifications. They are covered under 'Conditions of assessment' under Criterion 4.4. The centre should ensure that any queries are raised with SQA and resolved.</p>
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Examples of evidence	The completion of records showing assessors/verifiers consistently follow their centre's assessment/verification procedures.
Additional sources of information	<p>Refer to guidance in Criterion 4.6 regarding SQA's three stages of internal verification.</p> <p>The following documents are also useful reference documents:</p> <p>Guide to Assessment includes guidance on the assessment process for SQA Units</p> <p>Internal Verification: A Guide for Centres offering SQA Qualifications</p> <p>Internal verification: A Guide for Centres offering Ofqual Regulated Qualifications includes the purpose and function of internal verification.</p> <p>Internal Verification Toolkit on the QA page of SQA's website.</p> <p>The National Occupational Standards for Learning and Development includes the assessment standard 9 and internal verification standard 11 on which Assessor/Verifier qualifications are based.</p>

Criterion 4.3	Assessment instruments and methods and their selection and use must be valid, reliable, practicable, equitable and fair.
Awarding body requirements	<p>All of SQA's assessment principles must be applied whenever instruments/methods of assessment are selected and used. The abbreviated version of these principles are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Valid — appropriate assessment methods/ instruments have been applied. ◆ Reliable — clearly-defined standards of performance being used during assessment. ◆ Equitable — assessment is accessible to all candidates who have the potential to be successful in it. ◆ Fair — assessments have been objectively devised/selected and are free from barriers to achievement. Assessment practice must ensure all candidates have equal opportunities to succeed. ◆ Practicable — assessments have been carried out efficiently and effectively. <p>The above principles are described in full in SQAs Guide to Assessment. Refer to link in Additional sources of evidence.</p> <p>To support validity in assessment, centres must ensure access to SQA's Secure Site remains restricted to approved personnel only. SQA or centre devised assessments must be securely stored.</p>
Impact rating	High
Rationale for criterion inclusion	This criterion is about how a centre demonstrates its selection and use of assessment methods/instruments to ensure validity, reliability, equitability and fairness in assessment.
Support information	
Guidance on evidencing the criterion	<p>Methods of assessment, as described in SQA's Guide to Assessment, 'fall into the three categories of observation, product evaluation and questioning'. There are numerous methods of assessment available for centres' to use under each of these categories.</p> <p>In relation to regulated qualifications, the range of methods that can be used in assessments are usually defined in the Unit Specification and/or Assessment Strategy. They will also, where applicable, detail where methods such as simulation are permissible/not permissible.</p> <p>The Qualification Verifier in this context is checking the assessors'/verifiers' selection and use of methods in line with the requirements of the S/NVQ/QCF qualifications being assessed.</p> <p>For HN/NQ qualifications, assessment methods are the basis on which</p>

	<p>Instruments of assessment (referred to in the Guide to Assessment simply as ‘assessments’) are chosen. Some HN assessments are SQA devised — all centres have access to these on SQA’s Secure Site under ‘Assessment Exemplars/Assessment Support Packs.</p> <p>The centre may choose to use SQA’s assessments or use their own. Where centres use their own, it is strongly recommended that assessments are submitted to SQA for prior verification. Refer to Additional sources of information.</p> <p>Selection: regardless of whether assessments are SQA-devised or centre-devised, they should be subject to the centre’s system of internal verification before qualifications are delivered. Similarly, the approach to assessing regulated qualifications should be understood and agreed by all assessors/verifiers prior to assessment taking place.</p> <p>Methods (or in the case of HN/NQs, assessments) must be selected and used in a way that ensures they are a true measure of the candidate’s skills and /or knowledge. This helps give assessment its validity and reliability. The centre’s standardisation arrangements can support these assessment principles very well by ensuring at the outset, and on an ongoing basis, assessors/verifiers have a common understanding of how methods/assessments are to be applied.</p> <p>The approaches to assessment used should not impose any unnecessary barriers to individual candidates undertaking the assessments, and appropriate adjustments should be made, where this can be done without affecting the integrity of the assessment.</p> <p>Refer to ‘Assessment Arrangements’ link in Additional sources of information.</p>
<p>Examples of evidence</p>	<p>Documented evidence of methods/instruments having been selected and applied.</p>
<p>Additional sources of information</p>	<p>SQA’s Guide to Assessment includes more detailed information on the principles of assessment and selecting and using suitable methods and assessments.</p> <p>Information on prior verification can be found by clicking on this link.</p> <p>The selection of assessment methods/instruments forms part of first phase of the ‘three phases of internal verification’ in Part A of this guidance.</p> <p>SQA Assessment Arrangements</p>

Criterion 4.4	Assessment evidence must be the candidate's own work, generated under SQA's required conditions.
Awarding body requirements	Centres must ensure that the evidence on which the assessment decision is made solely belongs to the candidate under assessment. Assessors are only able to make accurate assessment decisions, if this is the case.
Impact rating	High
Rationale for criterion inclusion	Determining the authenticity of each candidate's work is of prime importance in ensuring the integrity of their achievement.
Support information	
Guidance on evidencing the criterion	<p>Ensuring only the work of each submitting candidate is considered for assessment is a key centre responsibility. For some qualifications, there is a requirement to carry out identify checks prior to examination/assessment.</p> <p>Candidates should be informed of the requirement to provide only authentic evidence. The responsibility for providing this information could involve one or more people/departments.</p> <p>Evidence generated by candidates not directly authenticated through for example direct assessor observation, should be subject to proportional authenticity checks, which may comprise comparison checks against previous submissions, questioning and witness testimony. Many centres use plagiarism detection software.</p> <p>Specific qualification arrangements/conditions are included in Unit Specifications, arrangements documents, group award strategy documents. Where applicable, they detail the conditions of assessment. For HNs they might be supervised assessment, invigilated and other examination conditions such as open-book or closed-book assessment. There may be specific requirements for e-assessment. For regulated qualifications, conditions might comprise use of realistic working environments; use of simulation.</p> <p>Assessors/verifiers should apply their centre's policy and procedures if they suspect or discover evidence that is not authentic. If malpractice is suspected, the centre should take the necessary steps to resolve the situation. System Verifiers look at these policies/procedures when they carry out centre visits. Malpractice includes plagiarism, copying and personation.</p>
Examples of evidence	Evidence of assessors and/or internal verifiers confirming candidates' work is authentic.

Additional sources of information	SQA's web page entitled Your Coursework covers information widely available to centres and candidates on topics such as plagiarism and collusion.
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Criterion 4.6	Evidence of candidates' work must be accurately and consistently judged by assessors against SQA's requirements.
Awarding body requirements	None in addition to the wording of the criterion.
Impact rating	High
Rationale for criterion inclusion	Accuracy and consistency in making assessment judgements not only ensure integrity in SQA qualifications, but help ensure that final assessment decisions made and communicated to candidates are fair.
Support information	
Guidance on evidencing the criterion	<p>Accuracy and consistency are achieved when all assessors have the same clear interpretation of the standards they are assessing and the type, quality and quantity of evidence that can be expected for assessments to be deemed successful/complete.</p> <p>In support of ensuring consistency in assessment, standardisation is of key importance for assessors/verifiers. It provides a forum for raising and resolving issues and it supports everyone in making accurate and consistent judgements/decisions in relation to evidence.</p> <p>The three stages of internal verification that SQA requires centres to build into their IV system appropriate and timely opportunities for standardisation. For example:</p> <p>Before assessment begins for new qualifications, assessors and verifiers have opportunities to agree methods/instruments of assessment, assessment approaches and assessment materials. This is also a requirement of the qualification approval process.</p> <p>During assessment, periodically throughout the life of the qualification, assessor/verifier collaboration and agreement can provide effective support for all team members — especially beneficial for new assessors/verifiers.</p> <p>After assessment, during a process of review, assessors and verifiers can collectively reflect on the overall effectiveness of the assessment process for a particular qualification with a view to taking action/making recommendations in order to improve practice.</p> <p>Whenever standardisation takes place, whether through physical meetings or by electronic means (discussion forums, e-mail exchange, webinars, tele/video conferencing etc), the outcomes of the process should be recorded through, for example, minutes of meetings and/or a continuous standardisation log.</p>
Examples of evidence	Assessment and internal verification records showing accurate and consistent assessment decisions being made.

Additional sources of information	<p>There are examples of different types of standardisation exercise on page 4 of SQA's Internal Verification: A Guide for Centres offering SQA Qualifications and on page 5 and 6 of SQA's Internal verification: A Guide for Centres offering Ofqual Regulated Qualifications.</p> <p>Internal Verification Toolkit on the QA page of SQA's website.</p>
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Criterion 4.7	Candidate evidence must be retained in line with SQA requirements.
Awarding body requirements	SQA requires centres to retain all candidate evidence for the Group Award/Units until at least three weeks after the official completion date. However, if the initial contact for the session is made by the Qualification Verifier before three weeks after the completion date, all candidate evidence must be retained until after the verification visit has taken place.
Impact rating	High
Rationale for criterion inclusion	<p>SQA requires that candidate assessment evidence is retained by centres for defined periods for the purposes of internal and external verification, and in case of any resulting queries, candidate internal assessment appeals or suspected malpractice.</p> <p>This requirement provides Qualification Verifiers with an opportunity to sample the optimum amount of evidence during a centre visit. Sampling will focus mainly on current 'live' candidate evidence, but may also include some past completed assessment evidence.</p>
Support information	
Guidance on verifying the criterion	<p>Evidence of centres meeting this criterion should derive from the access they allow Qualification Verifiers to information prior to the visit and then during the visit.</p> <p>The need for evidence to be retained for Qualification Verification purposes should not be confused with SQA's Retention Policy, which is about specific assessment records and is looked at by Systems Verifiers. Refer to Additional sources of information.</p>
Examples of evidence	The selected candidate evidence (pre-selected and on-site selected) available for qualification verification.
Additional sources of information	SQA's Retention Policy for SQA centres (which Systems Verifiers look at).

Criterion 4.9	Feedback from qualification verifiers must be disseminated to staff and used to inform assessment practice.
Awarding body requirements	None in addition to the wording of the criterion.
Impact rating	Medium
Rationale for criterion inclusion	If the results of Qualification Verification are made known to all relevant centre staff, this helps affirm what the centre is doing well as well as highlighting areas for improvement
Support information	
Guidance on verifying the criterion	<p>Centres must provide evidence of having disseminated the feedback contained in Qualification Verifier reports, and wherever there are Required Actions, having agreed how they will be met, and who will be responsible for taking the required actions.</p> <p>Centres may use meetings to disseminate feedback and/or circulate QV Reports to the relevant assessors/verifiers.</p> <p>Methods of dissemination will be dependent on each centre's policy/procedure. Procedures will usually have a degree of flexibility to take account of report content, eg the amount and nature of the action points/feedback given on a visit.</p> <p>Qualification Verifier reports can be a useful source of information when it comes to conducting reviews of resources (see Criterion 2.4).</p>
Examples of evidence	Evidence of feedback being disseminated to staff.