



# **Scottish Vocational Qualifications Internal Assessment Report 2015 Management**

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

# SVQ awards

## General comments

This verification group covers the following awards:

SVQ 2 in Team Leading at SCQF level 5 GC49 22

SVQ 3 in Management at SCQF level 7 GC46 23

SVQ 4 in Management at SCQF level 9 GC47 24

SVQ 5 in Management at SCQF level 11 GC48 25

These awards have now been in place since June 2011 and as such there is a high degree of familiarity with the awards, the standards and the Assessment Strategy. While new optional Units were added to the SVQ structures in April 2013, uptake of these Units is still relatively low.

The support materials that were developed continue to be of great assistance, helping to clarify the knowledge and understanding for the Units for which they are available. Candidates and centres are very complimentary about these materials. Overall, centres are very positive regarding the support provided for these awards and all the centres appear to be well aware of the requirements of the standards in the Management SVQs.

This verification group also includes seven Professional Development Awards (PDAs), each of which consists of two Units drawn from the Management standards. The PDAs provide a useful entry route for candidates who may wish to pursue a full SVQ qualification at a later date and/or can provide useful underpinning to management development/leadership development programmes within organisations whether these be public, private or third sector organisations. We are beginning to see a rise in PDA registrations and it is hoped that this will continue as more centres and their partner organisations see the potential value of these awards.

## Unit specifications, instruments of assessment and exemplification materials

As indicated earlier, the majority of assessors and internal verifiers have been involved with SVQ Management for some time and, as well as knowing the Unit specifications well, are also used to working with the portfolio method of assessment normally used for SVQ Management.

The occupational competence of all centre teams verified fully met the requirements of the Assessment Strategy as did their assessment and verification competences. While there have been limited changes in assessment/verification teams, where there have been changes centres have strong recruitment and selection procedures and induction arrangements for new members. These processes include a range of good practice; such as new assessors being shadowed by existing assessors; allowing new assessors to make provisional assessment decisions which can then be formally discussed

with experienced assessors and internal verifiers and; sampling plans which reflect the level of risk associated with new assessors. A few centres have developed performance management systems designed to provide support to new and existing assessors and internal verifiers. Such approaches ensure that the delivery team is fully aware of the requirements of the standards; any changes to the standards and of course the Assessment Strategy for Management SVQs.

Continuing professional development (CPD) is key to ensuring that assessors and verifiers are aware of changes or updates to the standards and assessment approaches. The majority of centres demonstrated strong CPD processes and support systems for assessors and verifiers ensuring that the knowledge of assessment and verification practice is current. Standardisation plays a key role in CPD; in one centre standardisation items cascade to the CPD logs ensuring that all staff are fully up to date which reinforces the importance of this link. However, CPD is not limited to assessment/verification, CPD relating to management is also required and centres are reminded that in general three management activities are expected.

The SQA support materials continue, as stated earlier, to be seen as particularly helpful for the 'knowledge and understanding' sections of the Units and centres frequently comment at External Verifiers' (EV) visits on how valuable they are to the delivery team, as well as commenting on their value to candidates. Centres make use of them in different ways but one approach is to get candidates to work through a support pack as the first step in undertaking a Unit. The responses to the activities can then be used as evidence for knowledge and understanding. However, in a number of cases this reading/study is not evident in the knowledge evidence provided by candidates.

Centres continue to develop their own resource materials to assist candidates. This includes generic material such as advice on portfolio building; how to write narrative/reflective accounts; how and when to use witness testimony, as well as specific guidance on particular Units such as knowledge questions, potential sources and types of evidence for a Unit. These all help to ensure that assessors and verifiers are able to fully support candidates in understanding the requirements of the Management standards.

### **Evidence Requirements**

Clear guidance is provided by SQA within the *Assessment Strategy for the SVQs in Management* regarding the evidence requirements of each Unit. Over the years this has been largely unchanged. In June 2014, it was advised that behaviours are likely to be demonstrated through performance and as such they do not need to be assessed. The vast majority of centres implemented this change and a number of centres using e-portfolios adapted their systems to accommodate this change. However, external verification found a few instances where behaviours were still being assessed which not only impacts on the validity of the assessment but also casts some doubt with regard to a centre's CPD and standardisation processes.

The Assessment Strategy for the SVQs in Management clearly state that it is the candidate's responsibility to provide tangible evidence to demonstrate that all aspects of each Unit in the award are met. This requires candidates to develop an understanding of how the standards relate to their current performance and the evidence they provide. In summary, candidates must, for every Unit, provide evidence which shows that their performance as managers meets all the performance criteria of the Unit and that they possess the knowledge and understanding associated with the Unit.

The majority of centres do understand these requirements and work hard with their candidates to meet them and there are some excellent examples of good and innovative practice in this regard, eg strong narratives/storyboards, use of recorded professional discussion explaining how the evidence meets the standards. However, a number of issues continue to arise in this regard and these have been commented upon in a number of external verifications this year. Where EVs have required actions invariably they have included reference to the evidence requirements. The need to fully meet the evidence requirements has been commented upon in all of the internal assessment reports since 2012. As such, it is slightly disappointing to note that these problems continue and have been identified regardless of the experience of the centre. It is therefore worth repeating some of the messages highlighted in previous reports:

- ◆ **Sufficiency** — candidates must provide sufficient evidence to show that all performance criteria are being met. While candidates should continue to submit the smallest possible number of evidence items this must be consistent with the requirement to fully cover all aspects of the standards. It may be that one piece of evidence, eg a report produced by the candidate covers all the performance criteria in a specific Unit but if this is the case it is beholden upon the candidate to demonstrate that this is so and beholden upon the centre to confirm this through the assessment and verification processes.
- ◆ **Attributable/authentic** — most, if not all centres, have in place mechanisms, eg candidate declarations, to ensure that the evidence provided can be directly attributed to the candidate. Indeed, assessment approaches such as professional discussion, witness testimony and observation help to ensure that the work is that of the candidate. However, there are still examples of policy documents, blank forms, guidance papers, etc in portfolios which are not attributable to the candidate. These documents are rarely relevant and as has been stated before the evidence lies in how candidates use these documents and how that evidence supports candidate claims for competency.
- ◆ **Signposting** — it is important that all evidence provided is clearly mapped to the standards for which competency is being claimed and it is the candidate's responsibility supported by his or her assessor to do so. A cross-referenced matrix on its own is not sufficient and there should be an explicit link to the standards in an appropriate form, eg annotation, personal statement or reflective account (see below). In the main, the e-portfolio systems in use provide a mechanism by which this can be done. On a few occasions these

have not been used and evidence has not been linked to the standards other than by a tick-box entry. In some cases evidence has been uploaded as a folder or cluster of files, reminiscent of a stamp collection, and the folder numbered and matched against each and every performance criteria in a Unit and quite often matched against other Units. Verification is nigh impossible as there is no narrative to establish which item within the folder is being claimed against any given performance criterion without working through the items individually. As centres and their candidates continue to develop holistic and more innovative ways of collecting evidence it is even more important for verifiers to be able to easily follow these links.

- ◆ **Reflective accounts/personal statements** — the use of these documents as a means of supporting or linking candidate evidence has been touched on in previous reports. However, there appears to be continuing uncertainty for some centres hence the reason for reproducing below the statement that was issued in June 2014 on the SQA SVQ Management website and contained within last year's report:

*'A number of centres queried the use of reflective accounts / personal statements as evidence towards performance criteria (PCs). While it can be argued that there are differences between the two, they are treated here as one and the same.'*

*According to the Assessment Guidelines for SVQs in Management: Candidates can produce personal statements that are written in the first person and describe their actions in completing a task. The candidate is expected to indicate the Outcomes of effective performance, behaviours (note 1) and knowledge and understanding which are demonstrated in the practice. The personal statement should always explicitly focus on the candidate's real work and not on what might be done.'*

*The Assessment Guidelines also state that: A personal statement may accompany the evidence for each Unit. The evidence requirements identify certain Outcomes where this is more likely to be of value. A personal statement is not real work evidence, but it can be useful in explaining and reflecting on behaviour in achieving certain Outcomes and why candidates behaved as they did, thus helping to link evidence of Outcomes to behaviours (note 1) and knowledge and understanding.'*

*Note 1: As outlined at SVQ Management event in May 2014, there is now no need to assess behaviours.'*

- ◆ **Knowledge and understanding** — on the whole the knowledge and understanding element is well managed by centres. However, it continues to be an issue for some centres in terms of level and how evidence may be gathered and presented. In a number of cases, the evidence to support knowledge and understanding is light and does not reflect the SCQF level, ie 7, 8, or 9 of the Unit against which it is being claimed. Ideally, knowledge and

understanding will be present in the performance evidence but that is not always possible and the candidate must provide evidence in some other way, eg annotation, personal statement, professional discussion, reflective account, questioning. The depth will vary depending on the evidence requirement and on the level: an SVQ level 5 candidate is more likely to provide a greater amount of reflection than a level 3. It is interesting to note that while all centres use the SQA support packs, some also use the CMI materials and many supplement with their own material. Unfortunately, this is not always evident within the knowledge evidence provided. A few candidates have questioned the relevance of the support materials because they have not been called upon to use them. There has been a common cry of 'we can lead the horse to water...' in discussion of the knowledge statements but an assessor via questioning, professional discussion and examination of the knowledge evidence (in line with the Assessment Strategy) can correct this. As before, the evidence must be clearly mapped to the standards.

While the points above apply to all Units in all the awards it is worth mentioning what may be described as those Units that are chosen infrequently eg DR5T 04 (Manage Finance for Your Area of Responsibility), FM5G 04 (Manage Knowledge in Your Area of Responsibility) and FM4L 04 (Promote Equality of Opportunity, Diversity and Inclusion in Your Area of Responsibility). These Units are generally more specialist in their nature and it is unlikely that a candidate in a general role without specific responsibility in that area will be able to generate the evidence required. It is important that the ability to generate sufficient evidence is fully discussed with the candidate and that the assessor has a good awareness of the type of evidence that may be required to fulfil the evidence requirements of these more specialist Units.

Feedback from candidates continues to be very positive reflecting the hard work being carried out in all centres by assessors and internal verifiers. The regularity of meetings with candidates; clear assessment planning; flexible contact regimes, eg online, telephone, face to face, Skype, all help to provide a high quality service. This candidate led approach works well as candidates start to understand the standards and what they entail in the candidates' particular work situations and is to be encouraged.

### **Administration of assessments**

External verification during 2014–15 confirmed that, in general, the SVQ Management awards at all levels continue to be assessed appropriately. Most reports regularly refer to the good quality of candidates' work and the commitment, enthusiasm and motivation of centre staff. In addition, candidate interviews often refer to how centres work with them to help them find ways of collecting evidence appropriate to their work situation.

As reported previously, most centres have developed robust systems to ensure that candidates are assessed appropriately and are at the appropriate level. A number of centres have created staged recruitment and selection processes which include use of the SQA diagnostic tool, an interview with the candidate, discussion with the employer and/or line manager all of which help to ensure that

candidates are at the appropriate level for the award being undertaken. Two centres have introduced a week long management development programme as a precursor to the award which helps build relationships between candidates and between candidates and assessors. It also helps develop knowledge and clarifies expectations.

These are further supported, in most centres, by clear targeted assessment plans that provide a structured approach which enables candidates to own and track their progress through the awards. Contact diaries and logs provide excellent evidence of how candidates and assessment processes are supported, and centres are encouraged to use these.

The last few years have witnessed a growth in the use of e-portfolio models using a wider range of e-portfolio platforms. These models work well and the majority of centres have successfully carried the disciplines of managing traditional (manual, hardcopy) portfolios over to e-platforms, eg clear tracking, evidence annotation, logging of assessment plans, recording of assessor and internal verifier feedback. Mobile technology also helps here with voice recordings and photographs being easily uploaded; a number of e-portfolio platforms have introduced apps which further enhance the use of these approaches. Where problems do arise they tend to be where the e-portfolio is used alongside an ad hoc mix of approaches, eg assessors creating assessment plans outside the e-portfolio model; assessment plans and assessment feedback being kept on a mix of paper and e-mail; and similarly with contact diaries, internal verifier feedback and candidate contact/support. It is accepted that there will be occasions where activity will take place outwith the confines of the e-portfolio but there should be a consistency within the team as to how these are managed and presented.

The majority of centres have developed comprehensive systems and documentation which supports the delivery, assessment and verification processes for the awards. Many of these are captured within the e-portfolio platform being used and this enables assessment plans, assessor feedback, internal verifier feedback and sampling to be logged, monitored and verified throughout the year. In some cases standardised templates, eg observation reports, reflective accounts/personal statements/storyboards and witness testimony reports, are uploaded to the e-portfolio mirroring the processes expected in a traditional, (hardcopy) portfolio. In the main, these processes work well.

Effective and robust assessment and internal verifier procedures are in place in the majority of centres which outline clear roles and responsibilities, sampling arrangements, internal verifier feedback arrangements, standardisation arrangements, and meetings. The key is the implantation of these procedures and it is good to see that in the vast majority of centres they are being implemented fully.

Discussions with candidates highlight the high level of support provided more often than not tailored to their individual needs in order to give the candidate the best chance of achieving the award being undertaken. Strong support is

particularly evident where there are well structured assessment plans with clear targets and good supporting feedback.

Internal verification systems in the main are strong and work well across centres. Internal verifiers are generally clear about their role and responsibilities and many play a key role, as they should, in improving assessment practice. The feedback provided by the internal verifier to the assessor is critical in this regard and should reflect eg development points from EV visits, action points from standardisation meetings and good assessment practice. Rarely is an unaccompanied signature or a brief statement of 'agreed' sufficient.

## **General feedback**

### **Feedback to candidates**

As noted earlier, the majority of centres have good systems that encourage and record formal and informal feedback and discussions with candidates, eg assessment plans, diary systems, logs and contact diaries. As indicated earlier, in some cases the recording of this feedback could be improved. In many cases, the recording of feedback is part of the assessment planning documentation and this can work well. Feedback is a key part of the learning process and should provide the detail and support that enables candidates to take responsibility for their work, learning and progress.

### **Feedback from candidates**

One of the enjoyable aspects of any visit is having the opportunity to speak to candidates. Once again, the feedback across all centres is almost always very positive and complimentary. Without prompting, candidates often refer to the helpfulness of their assessor and centre staff, the ease of contact, promptness in dealing with queries, and to a general supportive climate. For the majority of candidates e-portfolios with the capacity to upload and message 24/7 have been welcomed.

In addition, candidates find the SVQ Management useful, fitting in with their work and career development plans and many comment as to how it has 'opened doors' for them. Candidates frequently comment, for example, that they feel more confident, they feel they now have the vocabulary required when in discussion with other managers and they have a greater understanding of their role. Many also refer to specific improvements that they have made, eg organisation of their work and that of others, and how they communicate and engage with their team.

Overall, the feedback received from candidates is a reflection of the hard work and commitment of assessor and internal verifier staff throughout all centres.

### **Matching occupational role of candidates with SVQ Management**

Over the years this has become less of a problem as centres continues to adopt a structured approach to the recruitment and selection of candidates (see earlier). The use of the skills diagnostics, candidate interviews, employer discussions all serve to ensure that candidates are in a position that will enable

them to generate sufficient work-based evidence and carry sufficient management responsibility in order for them to meet the evidence requirements of their respective awards.

It is important that candidates are in a position which has the level of management responsibility appropriate to the awards being undertaken. For example, some potential SVQ 5 candidates may not carry the responsibility across their organisation that this level requires. It may be that candidates in this position while unable to demonstrate competence across all the Units in an award may be able to demonstrate competence in one of the areas covered by the PDAs and the PDA may be a better choice. As before, if a candidate has achieved at one level, eg SVQ 4, it is unlikely they can undertake the next level, eg SVQ 5, unless their job role has changed which would then allow the candidate to demonstrate competence at the new level.

### **Continuous improvement by centres**

Although the standards have not changed it is encouraging to see many centres continuing to refine, rework and continually improve their approach to the SVQ Management. One of the key drivers here is technology. As indicated, the use of e-portfolios is growing and this is being further enhanced by the use of mobile technologies. Centres continue to improve their systems and approaches to the benefit of candidates providing improved documentation, support materials, induction materials and contact regimes — all designed to improve the candidate experience.

### **CMI**

The opportunity for candidates to join the Chartered Management Institute (CMI) for free for 12 months is giving access to a large bank of resources. Student membership enables access to a range of management information, management tools and support, to help candidates to achieve their award and perform more effectively and efficiently within their roles. Despite the opportunities presented uptake remains low.

### **Areas of good practice**

As can be seen from the above there are many aspects of good practice that were apparent during external verification visits in 2014–15 many of which continue from previous years. This confirms the high level of commitment shown by centres and their staff and the desire to continually improve their offer. This is good practice in itself and can be seen as one of the most significant aspects of the assessment and verification of the SVQ Management.

The following points, which have been grouped together for convenience summarise some of the main aspects of good practice. There is some repetition here of points made earlier and in previous reports.

### **Portfolio development**

- ◆ Candidate support and direction in building portfolios manual and electronic allowing candidates to take early ownership of the process
- ◆ Flexible contact regimes via e-portfolios, e-mail, phone and Skype
- ◆ Further development of e-portfolios to embrace mobile technology which further enhances and widens the opportunity to provide work-based evidence
- ◆ Encouraging candidates to make links between evidence and the standards and finding innovative ways of demonstrating this, eg voice/ video recording
- ◆ Managed flexibility in portfolio structures, eg traditional and e-portfolios being available

### **Standardisation/internal verification**

- ◆ Use of standardisation meetings to support management CPD for assessors, eg one centre cascades standardisation items to assessor CPD logs
- ◆ Strong procedures for standardisation meetings, eg meeting calendars, regular 'in service' days for assessors, detailed minutes
- ◆ The use of decision logs, to record some of the many short informal meetings that take place
- ◆ Detailed internal verifier reports which make comments reflecting standardisation meetings, EV visits and/or development points and that also recognise the good work of the assessment team — these reports also include a mechanism to ensure corrective action is taken before the Units are signed-off
- ◆ Interim and final verification even with experienced assessors — this helps to highlight any issues at an early stage
- ◆ Using internal verifier reports as part of a continuous improvement process which can lead to the early resolution of issues

### **Communication with candidates**

- ◆ Learning/training contracts which clearly outline the responsibilities of the candidate, the centre and more often than not the employer
- ◆ Selection and induction programmes that ensure candidates are appropriately levelled and that optional Units chosen reflect the candidate's work situation
- ◆ Good assessment planning documentation that clearly indicates targets for candidates to work to
- ◆ Strong support mechanisms for candidates where issues may arise eg work, health, etc

### **Specific areas for improvement**

To a considerable extent, specific areas for improvement with respect to SVQ Management depend on what takes place in each individual centre. The action points set out in the external verification reports for each centre indicate actions that the centres could take to enhance the work they do. Recommendations

made in the individual reports may also help to enhance provision in each centre and centres are asked to give full consideration to these.

There are a few areas for improvement as indicated earlier and these are noted below. The extent to which these issues apply will vary from centre to centre.

### **Evidence Requirements**

- ◆ Ensure that there is sufficient evidence to meet the standards in terms of quantity and quality of evidence
- ◆ Ensure that candidates clearly demonstrate the links between the evidence provided and the standards
- ◆ Encourage candidates and assessors to desist from using policies, documents, etc that are not directly attributable to the candidate
- ◆ Ensure that the evidence for the knowledge requirements covers all three areas and fully reflects the requirements and level of the standards

### **Resources**

- ◆ Maintain CPD activity for all assessors and internal verifiers in line with the Assessment Strategy and reflect development in assessment/verification and in management (a minimum of three management activities is required)

### **Assessment and verification**

- ◆ Ensure that assessment planning documentation and feedback is maintained in a manner consistent with the centre's policy and procedures and is easily tracked and verified
- ◆ Ensure that where optional Units are chosen that are new or unfamiliar to the assessor and/or the centre that these are considered as part of the standardisation process and are sampled in line with the internal verification policy
- ◆ Improve internal verifier feedback to ensure that it supports assessors and contributes to improving assessment practice