



Assessment Arrangements

Summary Report to Schools and Colleges on the 2006/2007 Quality Assurance Exercise

Introduction

SQA's quality assurance procedures in relation to assessment arrangements are designed to ensure that schools and colleges have effective internal systems and procedures in place for identifying candidates' assessment needs and that there is evidence available to support their requests for assessment arrangements.

This report provides an overview and of the 2006/2007 quality assurance exercise highlighting some of the key issues identified by SQA's Quality Assurance Managers as well as examples of the good practice they found.

Monitoring of SQA's quality processes for assessment arrangements

In September/October 2006, our Quality Assurance Managers visited a total of 49 schools/colleges including local authority schools, independent schools and FE colleges throughout Scotland.

As in previous years, our approach to this monitoring exercise has been to focus on working with schools and colleges to develop a consistent and fair application of our policy on assessment arrangements across all centres. Our Quality Assurance Managers reported that, overall, staff in centres:

- ◆ had been well prepared for the audit visits
- ◆ were well informed about the process
- ◆ welcomed the opportunity to discuss procedures and processes with a member of SQA staff and felt that it was a useful development opportunity

Feedback from centres was, on the whole, very positive and the comments and suggestions submitted by centres will be considered fully and inform future practice. Full details of what centres thought about this year's monitoring exercise can be found in Appendix 1 of this report.

The monitoring exercise covered all of the key aspects/stages of the centres internal quality assurance procedures for making requests for assessment arrangements, including the formal verification of each request. Our Quality Assurance Managers, using the standard pro forma, (see Appendix 2) examined the evidence available to support the submitted requests. This retrospective review of evidence meant that our Quality Assurance Managers:

- ◆ had the opportunity to review a centre’s evidence for their finalised submission of requests to SQA
- ◆ were in a better position to offer more timely and appropriate advice, guidance and support to centres — helping centres in gathering evidence for their requests for the following diet of examinations.
- ◆ had more time to address any specific concerns or issues the centre may have had — ensuring that candidates were not disadvantaged.

Key aspects/stages of SQA’s quality process for assessment arrangements

Internal verification meeting

Our Quality Assurance Managers found that the majority of centres visited had satisfactory arrangements for holding the internal verification meeting and do retain a record of the meeting. However, a small number of centres were required to further develop their systems to ensure that evidence of the formal verification meeting is available for audit, (including a formal signed and dated minute/note of the meeting) and that appropriate personnel are present at this meeting (a senior member of staff independent of the learning support structure within the centre).

While it is recognised that there will be differences in the way that schools/colleges carry out their internal verification, the formal internal verification meeting is, nevertheless, fundamentally important for a robust internal quality assurance process. Schools/colleges need to be assured that the decision to request — or not to request — an assessment arrangement for a particular candidate is compliant with SQA guidance and relevant disability legislation.

Confirmation from the candidates that they have agreed to the assessment arrangements and are intending to use them.

The majority of schools/colleges had evidence of candidate involvement, either in the discussions about or in actually agreeing to the assessment arrangements being requested on their behalf. It is very important that candidates (and parents/guardians where relevant) are fully involved and have agreed to the assessment arrangements being put in place.

Evidence of the disability/additional support need and how this affects the teaching and learning situation

In all but two of the centres sampled, there was appropriate evidence available for this aspect of the process. Generally, evidence was up to date and relevant and included information from a range of professionals (psychological and other assessments, individual learning plans (IEPs), support plans (PLSPs) etc).

Evidence of the current need for support, how it is met and how it relates to the assessment arrangements requested

Again, the majority of schools/colleges had the necessary evidence available of the candidates' need for on-going support in the class and how this support linked to their need for assessment arrangements. There were good examples of documentation relating to the support being provided on an on-going basis either within the classroom or getting assistance from learning support staff in the learning support base/department.

Evidence that varying needs across subjects have been taken into account

Evidence was available from the majority of schools/colleges that consultation with individual subject teachers had taken place and that subject requirements had been considered in determining the most appropriate arrangements for particular candidates. In some cases there had been whole school staff development to raise awareness of the need for more formal consultation between subject staff and learning support staff.

However, it was clear that in a small number of schools and colleges, some work still needed to be done to encourage subject teachers to provide relevant evidence of the candidates' need for particular arrangements in particular subjects. Individual subject teacher involvement is fundamental to the quality assurance process; subject teachers are best placed to know the assessment demands of their subjects and will see on a day to day basis the difficulties these subject demands place on disabled candidates and/or those with additional support needs.

Evidence for particular types of arrangements

The majority of schools and colleges presented the appropriate evidence of the candidates' need for a particular type of assessment arrangement. Evidence for the use of extra time remains the one area which can be problematic for centres. SQA recognises that it is often difficult for centres to provide robust evidence from the classroom situation which confirms the candidate's need for a specific amount of extra time in the external examination, nevertheless, centres should have some type of evidence of the candidate's need for extra time and a justification for the amount of extra that is being requested.

Summary

From this year's exercise, it is clear that all of the schools and colleges visited are working towards producing robust evidence and many examples of good practice were found by our Quality Assurance Managers. SQA will update its current exemplars of good practice in the light of this year's visits.

Evaluation of QAM Exercise Session 2006/2007

In session 2006/2007 **Quality Assurance Managers** visited a total of 49 centres. Forty centres responded to the feedback form.

What did you think of the arrangements prior to the visit (organising date and information received)?

Excellent (2)

Very Good (6)

Absolutely fine (2)

Fine (4)

Fine except for the prospect of it taking 3 hours!

Satisfactory (2)

Good Communication - Written Communication followed by email and telephone call (2) Very Efficient. Date made to suit school

Good (5)

Ok

Appropriate

No problems (2)

Option of several dates and am/pm allowed flexibility

QAM was very flexible with date and accommodated needs of college extremely well

Very clear and organized (4)

QAM was very considerate in arranging visit after our HMIE inspection

Original date satisfactory. Unavoidable postponement caused us some concern re timescale for verification and agreement meetings prior to S4 prelims in December

Very efficient with paper copy of date etc received

What did you think of the effectiveness of the Quality Assurance Manager's communication during the visit?

Excellent (6) support from QAM — able to ask questions
Excellent communication skills (2)
Very good (9)
Good (4), very clear — put in a way that was constructive (4)
First Class
Effective clear and helpful (2)
Very clear and effective (2)
Adopted a most approachable and friendly approach ensuring high level of engagement/ discussion
QAM was very helpful and reassuring
QAM was very friendly, helpful and easy to talk to.
Very helpful, clarified a number of points for us
Very effective , clear explanations
QAM explained clearly the purpose of the visit and put us at ease
Clear explanation of purpose of visit and helpful in gaining information
Highly effective and helpful (2)
QAM communicated well. Friendly — easy to talk to
QAM was open to discussion and had a good 'listening ear'

Did you feel that the questions asked were appropriate and allowed you to fully demonstrate your processes and present appropriate evidence?

Yes (13)
Very pertinent questioning posed which helped me to ascertain what was required re preparing documentation and procedures
Allowed staff to demonstrate good practice within the school
Absolutely, I felt that QAM was prepared to listen
Questions were appropriate but felt a lack of time with the QAM
Discussions on how to build on existing good procedures
Covered ever aspect on SQA checklist
Assisted greatly in the ongoing development of our procedures
QAM allowed for full discussions to take place
Line of questioning very appropriate
Questions were appropriate and put in a supportive way. Procedures were patiently looked at.
It was a two way process — we began with school admissions and worked through the exam entry arrangements.

Were you provided with sufficient opportunity to raise any issues/concerns?

Yes (38)

High level of discussion pertinent to issues/concerns with mutual agreement on setting of deadlines.

Good Lines of communication

Able to have free ranging discussion

Good dialogue was established

QAM gave us ample time to discuss issues and also gave direction for additional support

QAM found out answers at a later date if he couldn't provide them on the day.

Because QAM was so friendly there was no sense of tension.

What information would you find most helpful after an Audit?

No more than is provided at present (2)

Areas which we need to improve/amend

Areas where we excel, conform or are deficient

Feedback on areas causing concern

Full feedback comments and indication of where good practice/alternative methods exist (2)

What was proposed by QAM was a realistic suggestion of how we could improve

Feedback on action taken following the audit

General suggestions

Feedback and development points

Feedback of overall system in place

Summary of areas we should work on.

Feedback was adequate

Collating evidence

Strengths and weaknesses to go forward

Identification of areas which require to be improved

Had there been any concerns it would have been helpful to receive constructive recommendations

Clarification of verification process

The written report will be most helpful (3)

Identify examples of good practice in the centre

If deficit found, SQA to suggest appropriate strategies for remediation

Full information about strengths and weaknesses of our own Quality Assurance procedures; evidence of good practice; guidance on how to implement any procedural changes required

Statistical comparisons with like schools

Some useful recommendations oral and written feedback very good

Follow up and feedback (both of which were provided) (2) Feedback was well organised

Recognition that we are following guidelines laid down by SQA

Maybe a general, more personal statement about the school's performance rather than just a tick box form.

Did you find the overall process helpful?

Yes (26) very supportive (8) and worthwhile

Very useful (2). Feedback provided very quickly (written)

And very non-threatening. Made clear in introduction

Especially with new guidelines

Provided useful information and advice

An overall positive experience which gave us the opportunity to check and evaluate our processes

Extremely, with a high level of support provided

This gave me reassurance that we are on the right track

Useful to see that our procedures are satisfactory, but I cannot say it was 'helpful'

Do you have any suggestions which you feel could enhance the process (a) during the event and/or (b) after the event? If so please specify.

We were given an opportunity to be audited at a time and place which caused us the least inconvenience — thank you for that. It was very helpful process and a very positive one for us

Examples of good practice

Staff should be released from their classes with cover.

Felt the random sample was of former pupils mainly. Things had improved and collation of evidence was better with current pupils. Also meant we had to go into the archives to retrieve files which did waste time.

List of what you are looking for beforehand so that it is to hand if school has it

Very helpful to have been audited — good for schools to know they are on the right track. A positive experience

A presentation to all staff would be very helpful to help them understand the standards and evidence required

I was very pleased with the process and found it most helpful

Continued opportunities to attend SQA seminars to ensure that our strategies remain up to date and robust

Whilst the time of year (October) for a retrospective audit is acceptable, the notification of selection for audit should arrive prior to the issue of SQA results, in order to facilitate retention of evidence into the next session.

The audit was conducted in a friendly yet thorough manner that provided useful clarification and advice on aspects of the application process. Perhaps provision of a pro forma/checklist of materials beforehand would be beneficial.

During the event: Examples of good practice would be beneficial. I would be happy to pass on the materials I use to save someone else reinventing the wheel. Perhaps there is someone out there who has something useful to Greenwood

After the event: looking forward to seeing written comments, Relief!!!

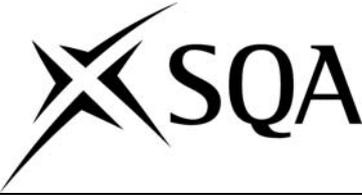
I think more appreciation of the enormous efforts that we have gone to in order to meet SQA's requirements, would have been welcomed by us. The evidence gathering procedures that we have adopted have been a very significant extra workload on an already overstretched department and have added to the heavy workload of other staff. I would have welcomed any suggestions on how we could do anything differently — perhaps gleaned from contact with other schools. We have been asked to make sure we have samples of pupils work for each subject, in addition to responses from teachers. I know this is required in your guidelines — we will do it, but I actually think it is an unnecessary layer of bureaucracy. We trust our teachers to give accurate and responsible feedback without insisting on paper copies.

I must say I was quite worried about the prospect of such a visit after the original meetings I went to for teachers in Edinburgh. But by the time QAM visited (in our third year of the system) I was pleased with our system and did not feel it would meet with much criticism. Our headmaster was very pleased with QAM's report. I think the whole process of AA works very well.

Other

The QAM who visited was very helpful and she listened very carefully to all our concerns. She made various helpful suggestions

While the school appreciates the rationale behind the QA process we remain gravely concerned that the move to emphasize the primary role of the classroom teacher rather than the SfL 'expert' may lead to anxiety for staff and poorer outcomes for students. Did SQA survey parental opinion prior to introducing this change?

<p>SUMMARY OF EVIDENCE AVAILABLE IN CENTRE TO SUPPORT A REQUEST FOR AN ASSESSMENT ARRANGEMENT</p>	<p>QA2</p> 
<p><i>The Auditor will have sampled evidence to ensure that your centre's systems and procedures continue to comply with the centre's responsibilities for Process 1: Management of an SQA centre, Criterion 1.5 There are systems in place for the management of appropriate assessment arrangements for candidates with disabilities and/ or additional support needs</i></p> <p><i>The centre:</i></p> <p><i>1.5e) demonstrates a commitment to equal opportunity in the selection, admission, support and assessment of candidates</i></p> <p><i>1.5f) seeks SQA approval for assessment arrangements and implements these arrangements as agreed</i></p> <p><i>1.5g) retains evidence justifying the need for assessment arrangements</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>SQA's Quality Framework : A Guide for Centres March 2006</i></p>	

Centre Name		Centre Number	
Candidate sample			
Auditor			
Date			
Evidence Requirements		Overall Comments	
1	Evidence of the verification meeting.		
2	Evidence of confirmation from the candidate that they have agreed to the assessment arrangements and are intending to use them.		
3	Evidence of disability/additional support needs and how this generally affects the learning and teaching situation.		
4	Evidence of need for current support, how it is met and how it relates to the arrangements requested.		
5	Evidence that varying needs across subjects have been taken into account.		
6	Evidence for particular adjustments.		

Good Practice			
Required Action Points (RA) and Recommendations (REC)			
Action agreed with centre with dates			
			Tick
Current Requests can be processed.			
Signature		Date	