



Internal Verification: A Guide for Centres offering SQA Qualifications

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The Optima Building, 58 Robertson Street, Glasgow G2 8DQ
Ironmills Road, Dalkeith, Midlothian EH22 1LE

www.sqa.org.uk

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About this guide

All centres offering SQA qualifications must have an effective internal quality assurance system which ensures that all candidates are assessed accurately, fairly and consistently to national standards. This system is known as internal verification.

This guide is designed to provide support for everyone involved in the internal quality assurance of SQA qualifications. It explains the purpose of internal verification and specific aspects of internal verification, such as selecting a sample and standardisation.

We hope that this guide will help you in the development and maintenance of an effective internal quality assurance system.

This guide complements the SQA [Guide to Assessment](#) and [Guide to Approval](#).

Introduction

Verification is a crucial element of quality assurance. It ensures that all candidates entered for the same qualification are assessed fairly and consistently to the specified standard. SQA maintains national standards within and across centres using a range of external verification methods, and centres must ensure that their candidates are assessed accurately and consistently in line with these standards.

Every SQA centre is responsible for operating an effective and documented internal quality assurance system. This is a requirement of being an SQA approved centre.

Just as there is a wide range of SQA qualifications and a great variety of centres, we recognise that there are many different ways of operating effective internal quality assurance processes. For example, the internal verification system for a small training company will be very different from that of a large secondary school; and a college course team at faculty level will be very different from an employer operating across multiple sites.

Another aspect to this is partnerships between centres. Cross-sector partnership arrangements are increasingly being used to deliver qualifications. Any qualification that is offered in partnership with another organisation will require a different model for internal quality assurance. It is your responsibility to use a system that is appropriate for your centre's organisational structure, the qualification, and your candidates.

We have no wish to impose a particular quality assurance system on centres, although all systems must meet our quality requirements and ensure that all candidates are assessed to national standards.

Note: Where the term 'internal verifier' appears in this guide it should be taken as a form of shorthand for any individual or team process by which the key objectives of internal verification are met.

The purpose of internal verification

The majority of SQA qualifications are internally assessed by centres, which means that the centre's own assessors are responsible for deciding how candidates have performed in relation to the national standards for the qualification.

Internal assessment can be done using assessments that centres have developed, or using assessments provided by SQA. In both cases, though, all assessments that contribute to an SQA qualification must be valid, reliable, practicable, equitable and fair — and assessors must apply the standards of assessment uniformly and consistently. The purpose of internal verification is to ensure that these principles are met, regardless of the particular system used by a centre.

The internal verifier's role is critical in ensuring that assessments are appropriately conducted and that any possibility of malpractice is minimised. An effective internal verification system will ensure that:

- ◆ valid assessments are used for each qualification
- ◆ assessments are capable of generating sufficient evidence to allow candidates to show that they have met the national standard
- ◆ all assessors are familiar with the national standard
- ◆ assessors reach accurate and consistent decisions for the same qualification for all candidates in their centre in line with national standards

Centres' responsibilities

Centres must ensure that all candidates have equal and fair access to assessment. This may involve providing assessment arrangements or making reasonable adjustments in accordance with the Equality Act. (Guidance documents about candidates with additional support needs are available on the [Assessment Arrangements](#) section of our website.)

Centres are responsible for organising internal verification. This includes scheduling assessments, ensuring that accurate internal verification records are kept, and preparing for external verification. The timing of assessment, and your centre's policy on re-assessment opportunities, should be agreed in advance of the actual assessment. These activities may form part of an internal verifier's role in some centres, while others may use a different system. The important point is that these key processes are carried out.

It is your centre's responsibility to ensure that all internal verifiers are competent in their role and that they understand and apply the internal quality assurance system consistently. You should have an effective selection and induction process for internal verifiers, and any training or development needs for internal verifiers should be identified.

Over time SQA's External Verifier will sample the work of all assessors and internal verifiers for a particular Unit, and will highlight any issues with internal verification. You should ensure that these are addressed — shortcomings in internal verification can prevent candidates getting their certificates. In any case, reviewing your internal quality assurance systems is always good practice.

It is also good practice to have a written procedure, including schedules and methodology, so that all assessors and internal verifiers understand your quality assurance process. External Verifiers also find this very helpful.

You may use a range of internal quality assurance processes for the different qualifications that you offer, particularly if you have partnership arrangements with other centres or organisations, such as local authorities or employers. This can help ensure that assessment decisions are consistent between assessors who are applying the assessment in different situations and contexts, and with different candidates. It can also be helpful in developing and sharing good practice.

Effective internal verification is an ongoing process. It allows good practice to be shared, and can help identify problems at an early stage. Leaving internal verification to the end of the assessment process is poor practice and can jeopardise candidates' chances of gaining qualifications because there may not be sufficient time to carry out remedial action or re-assessment.

The functions of internal verification

The internal verifier or verifier team is responsible for ensuring the validity of internal assessments and the reliability of assessors' judgements. This responsibility has several parts:

- ◆ supporting assessors
- ◆ checking assessment instruments to ensure validity
- ◆ arranging standardisation exercises
- ◆ sampling assessment decisions
- ◆ maintaining assessment and verification records

Once internal verifiers are satisfied that these requirements have been met, they act as 'guarantors' that national standards are being met.

Please note that no individual can act as assessor and internal verifier for the same group of candidates.

Supporting assessors

The internal verifier must have an appropriate qualification and/or expertise in the subject area, and must be familiar with the national standard.

The internal verifier is responsible for ensuring that the chosen assessment instrument is valid, fair and practicable. This means they need to have knowledge of different assessment methods and instruments and must have assessment expertise.

The internal verifier can have a developmental role for less experienced assessors by offering advice and guidance. This kind of support should be ongoing throughout the qualification, and not be left to the point of assessment for certification purposes.

SQA offers Assessor and Verifier Qualifications. These are designed to improve the quality and rigour of assessment. They are required by anyone delivering government-funded training and learning programmes, but can be taken by anyone who is involved with internal quality assurance. There is more information on the [Learning and Development SVQs/PDAs](#) section of the SQA website.

Once again, it must be stressed that no individual may act as assessor **and** internal verifier for the same group of candidates.

Checking assessment instruments to ensure validity

A valid assessment is one that is designed to allow candidates to produce evidence to show that they have the required knowledge, understanding and

skills for the qualification they are aiming for. In other words, checking the validity of an assessment instrument means finding the answer to the question 'Is the assessment actually doing what it is supposed to be doing?' For example, a practical assessment should be used to assess practical skills. An assessment in which candidates were asked to write about a practical skill rather than demonstrate it would have low validity.

All assessment instruments must be checked to ensure their validity before being taken by candidates. Even when assessments have been drawn from a national bank, such as the National Assessment Resource (NAR), the internal verifier must ensure that all assessors have a common understanding of the standards required. Meetings between assessors to discuss the planned assessment will help to minimise any differences in interpretation.

Agreeing a scheme for judging the evidence also helps assessors to make consistent and accurate assessment decisions in line with national standards. The scheme you use could be a checklist for observing candidate performance, a set of questions to test underlying knowledge and understanding, protocols for professional discussion, or agreeing the use of video or multi-media evidence. Procedures to consider any indirect evidence of candidate achievement, such as witness testimony, should also be discussed and agreed. The internal verifier is responsible for ensuring that assessment schemes are clear and correct.

Prior verification

SQA's prior verification service provides feedback on proposed assessment instruments and gives a centre confidence that their proposed assessment is fit for purpose and does not compromise national standards. External verification reports clearly show that prior verification can prevent problems arising at a later date. The service is currently offered free of charge. It has a turnaround time of at least six weeks to allow for the possibility of having to take some corrective action if prior verification identifies flaws in the assessment materials.

Arranging standardisation exercises

Reliability is a measure of the accuracy and consistency of assessors' judgements. Standardisation is an important part of ensuring the reliability of assessment decisions for all candidates in a centre.

Standardisation exercises identify any discrepancies between assessors in their judgement of candidates' evidence and allow adjustments to be made to remedy these. As well as reducing subjectivity among assessors, it helps to improve the consistency of their judgements and allows internal verifiers to identify and disseminate good practice.

There are different ways of carrying out standardisation, and the internal verifier should make sure that the method used is the most appropriate for the nature of the evidence.

The following examples are standardisation exercises used by centres.

Agreement trials: Assessors work together to consider examples of candidates' work based on the assessment scheme. By discussing discrepancies and coming to a shared understanding based on the assessment criteria, the assessors reach a common understanding. Involving the internal verifier is very helpful in achieving consensus.

Dual assessment: Two assessors assess the same candidates. Teaming an experienced assessor with a new assessor is not uncommon, but there are benefits for any assessor in checking their judgement, particularly for new qualifications and awards. It also encourages co-operative working.

Cross assessment: Assessors exchange candidate evidence to check each other's interpretation of the standard. This does not mean that different assessors must follow the same assessment procedure or even use the same assessment material.

Cross assessment is often presumed to apply mainly to evidence within a centre, but it can also be used across centres. It is frequently used by multi-site centres such as large colleges, training providers and employers.

Evidence review: In this process the internal verifier collates assessed candidate evidence and asks a group of assessors to discuss any discrepancies between their individual judgements. This allows professional development as well as ensuring a shared understanding.

Double marking: Generally used with written evidence, double marking is a form of cross-assessment in which assessors exchange the same candidate evidence to check each other's interpretation of the standard.

Blind marking: Again, mostly used with written evidence, blind marking, is intended to reduce any bias, however unintentional, by an assessor. In one form of blind marking, evidence is marked by two assessors, but each is unaware of the other's mark. Discrepancies between the marks can then be resolved. In another form, evidence can be made anonymous by removing the candidate's details.

Standardisation exercises should take place throughout the assessment process to improve the consistency of assessors' judgements. Records of standardisation exercises, including any feedback to assessors, should be kept as evidence of internal verification activity.

Procedures should also ensure that standardisation is carried out for centres operating across multiple sites or with partnership arrangements.

Sampling assessment decisions

The internal verifier should select a sample of candidate evidence to check that each assessor is making consistent decisions in line with national standards.

Sampling must be ongoing through the assessment process, not end-loaded. This allows the internal verifier to review assessment judgements before summative decisions are made. This identifies problems at an early stage and will allow support or training to be provided to assessors.

A range of assessment methods should be included in the sample. Different centres have different sampling regimes and sample sizes — eg the square root of the number of candidates. The selection of a completely random sample has strengths, but the critical aspect of any sample is that it must be sufficient to ensure consistency of assessment decisions across each qualification. Over time, all assessors and assessment methods should be included in the sample. It is good practice to document all sampling strategies in a written internal verification procedure.

There are several key features that should be considered in selecting a sample. These include:

- ◆ first time delivery of an SQA qualification or award
- ◆ new assessor
- ◆ range of levels of qualifications
- ◆ range of candidate groups
- ◆ mode of delivery (full/part time, online, multiple sites, partnership arrangement)
- ◆ age and gender of candidates
- ◆ achieved/not achieved
- ◆ revised assessment instruments
- ◆ previous issues or problems identified by internal or external verification
- ◆ cost and resource effectiveness

The outcomes of internal verification should be given as feedback to the assessors and used to refine assessment. This is why it is essential that sampling takes place throughout the assessment process as it ensures fairness to all candidates.

All assessment that leads to certification must be sampled and 'signed off' by the internal verifier before candidates' results are sent to SQA. This can be done by countersigning the assessor's form, by using an internal verification checklist, or by some other means devised by the centre.

Maintaining assessment and verification records

All assessment results leading to SQA certification must be signed by the internal verifier. This is commonly done by countersigning the assessor's form or using an internal verification checklist, but it could be done by other means devised by the centre. The important point is that clear and accurate records of effective internal verification activity are kept, and that they are available to the External Verifier and to SQA.

The records that are kept will include:

- ◆ validated assessment material
- ◆ reports of any meetings, including standardisation exercises
- ◆ records of observation of assessment
- ◆ checklists/marketing schemes
- ◆ candidate records
- ◆ records of all sampling activity
- ◆ feedback to assessors

How this information is held and updated is at the discretion of the centre, but it must be stored securely and in a retrievable format.

The External Verifier will scrutinise candidates' evidence across as wide a range as possible, and will sample the work of all assessors and internal verifiers.

There is more information in our published guidance [External Verification: A Guide for Centres](#), and [SQA Academy](#) has a course on 'Preparing for a Verification Visit'.

Please also see our policies on retention of evidence. Evidence must be retained in accordance with these policies.

Glossary

Agreement trial	A process of standardisation where assessors work in a group with the internal verifier to consider examples of candidates' work and to reach a shared understanding on applying a common standard.
Assessment	The process of evaluating how effectively learning is occurring. For SQA qualifications the process of generating and collecting evidence of a candidate's attainment of knowledge, and skills and judging that evidence against defined standards for formal certification. SQA assessment can be internal, or external, or a combination of both.
Assessor	The person designated in a centre to be responsible for collecting evidence of candidates' competence, judging it and recording attainment.
Assessor and Verifier Units	Qualifications designed to improve the quality and rigour of assessment. They are required by anyone delivering government-funded training and learning programmes.
Awarding body	An organisation or consortium which awards qualifications.
Candidate	The individual entered for an SQA qualification.
Centre	An organisation or consortium accountable to an awarding body for the assessment arrangements leading to a qualification. A centre could, for instance, be an educational institution, training provider or employer, and it may operate across more than one organisation or site.
Certificate	The record of attainment in a qualification issued by an awarding body.
Checklist	A means of recording the judgements made about activities performed by candidates.
Competence	The ability to carry out specified activities to predetermined standards of performance.
Competence based assessment	An assessment process where evidence is collected, which is then used as the basis on which judgements are made concerning progress towards satisfaction of fixed Performance Criteria. (Competence-based assessment of an individual takes no account of the performance of others in the wider group being assessed.)

Direct evidence	A term used to describe evidence of candidate performance according to the requirements laid down on the outcome that assessors have witnessed themselves. This can be performance or product evidence but, because the assessor has seen the evidence directly, it is a very reliable form of evidence.
Evidence	Materials provided by a candidate as proof of his or her competence against specified criteria.
Evidence Requirements	The mandatory evidence requirements for SQA Units. They state what candidates have to do, to what standard, and how much evidence they have to produce to demonstrate that they have achieved the outcome. The Evidence Requirements detail the full breadth of achievement of knowledge and/or skills required, the sampling required, and any specific conditions in which the evidence is to be produced.
External verification	The process of ensuring that national standards are maintained consistently across all centres.
External Verifier	A person appointed by SQA who is responsible for the quality assurance of a centre's provision and for ensuring that standards of assessment are applied uniformly and consistently across centres. An External Verifier is often appointed on a subject area basis or for verification groups of Units.
Indirect evidence	Something that someone other than the assessor has observed or said about the candidate. Corroboration is required for indirect evidence.
Instrument of assessment	A means of generating evidence of a learner's knowledge and/or skills.
Internal assessment	An assessment marked within the institution delivering the programme of learning, including by the person who has delivered the learning.
Internal quality assurance	The process of ensuring that the provision at centre and subject level conforms to the approved procedures and that consistency is being achieved within the centre.
Internal verification	The process of ensuring that standards of assessment are applied uniformly and consistently within a centre in line with national standards.

Internal verifier	Person or persons appointed by the centre to ensure that assessors apply standards of assessment uniformly and consistently.
Learner	Someone who is following a course of study at a school, college of further education, with a training provider, or through an employer.
Malpractice	Learners using the assistance or work of others and passing it off as their own for assessment purposes.
Observation	A method of assessment in which the candidate is observed carrying out tasks that reflect the performance criteria given in outcomes.
Practicability	A measure of the feasibility or administrative efficiency of the assessment process. A valid and reliable assessment may not be practicable due to the cost or time required to carry it out.
Quality assurance system	Any system at local, regional and national level that promotes confidence in a qualification by guaranteeing the maintenance of standards.
Reliability	The extent to which an assessment's results are accurate and consistent and fair between different assessors over time.
Standard	The criteria for success at a particular level. A pre-determined national level of attainment for SQA certification.
Standardisation	Process to check, adjust and ensure that assessment criteria and processes (including both the administration of the assessment itself, and its marking) are applied consistently by assessors and verifiers. Standardisation can be carried out within centres (internal standardisation) as well as by Awarding Bodies.
Summative assessment	Assessment, generally undertaken at the end of a learning activity or programme of learning, which is used to make a judgement on the candidate's overall attainment. A key purpose of summative assessment is to record, and often grade, the candidate's performance in relation to the stated learning objectives of the programme or qualification.

Validity	The degree to which an assessment tests the actual abilities that it is supposed to test and the appropriateness of the interpretation and use of the results for any assessment instrument (eg a driving test where a candidate is observed driving is highly valid. A test where a candidate describes how they would drive is less valid). There are many different measures of validity.
Verification	The process of ensuring that quality assurance systems are being maintained. Verification can be either internal, ie within the centre, or external, ie undertaken by the awarding body
Witness testimony	Information supplied by someone other than the assessor on a candidate's competence. Weight given to witness testimony will depend on the individual's specialist and assessment knowledge. The use of witness testimony rests with the assessor.