



Guide to Approval

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Introduction

This guide is designed to be of use to the following organisations:

- ◆ schools, colleges and other training providers whose sole purpose is the delivery of training and the assessment of candidates
- ◆ private and public sector companies who offer training to their employees
- ◆ other organisations, including those outwith Scotland, who wish to offer SQA qualifications

There are four families of qualifications in the SQA framework:

- ◆ Vocational Qualifications (VQs)
 - Scottish Vocational Qualifications
 - National Vocational Qualifications
 - Scottish Progression Awards

- ◆ National Qualifications (NQs)
 - National Certificates
 - Scottish Courses
 - Skills for Work
 - Scottish Baccalaureates
 - Ungraded National Courses
 - National Progression Awards

- ◆ Higher National Qualifications (HNs)
 - Higher National Certificates and Diplomas
 - Professional Development Awards

- ◆ Specialist Awards
 - Customised Awards (Cs)
 - International Vocational Awards (IVAs)

The following guidance is intended to cover all of these product families and where guidance is specific to any product family, this will be stated.

1 Approval: an overview

It is important that you do not begin to offer any of our qualifications before approval has been sought and obtained.

There are two types of approval:

- ◆ initial approval as an SQA centre
- ◆ approval to offer specific qualifications

Initial approval as an SQA centre is a two-stage process designed to confirm that your centre has the management structure and quality assurance systems to support the delivery, assessment and internal verification of SQA qualifications. It also includes gaining approval to offer your first qualification.

Approval to offer specific qualifications is confirmation of our belief that your centre has the staff, reference and learning materials, assessment materials, equipment and accommodation you will need to deliver and assess the qualifications listed on your application.

For centre and specific qualification approval, you must demonstrate your **potential** to meet our approval criteria. An SQA centre number will only be issued to you after we are sure that you have the infrastructure to become an approved SQA centre **and** you have been approved to offer your first qualification.

After approval has been obtained, you will have to show that you are continuing to meet our criteria as you deliver and assess the qualifications.

We routinely monitor all our approved centres to ensure that the national standards for our qualifications are maintained. For some jointly-awarded SVQs, other professional bodies or institutions which have a formal agreement with SQA will do some or all of the monitoring. We reserve the right to withdraw approval should we find that your centre is not meeting our criteria. Further details of our monitoring processes are in the section 'What happens after approval' (pages 24 and 25).

2 How to apply for approval

The next two sections of this guide tell you how to apply for approval. Section 3 tells you how to apply for initial approval as an SQA centre. Section 4 offers advice on how to apply for approval to offer a specific qualification. If you are seeking initial approval as a centre you should read Sections 3 and 4.

You must apply for centre approval and approval to offer your first specific qualification at the same time using a combined centre and qualification approval form which is available from the Business Development and Customer Support Team at SQA (see below). When both stages of your application have been successfully concluded, a centre number will be issued and you will then be able to send us entries from your candidates who wish to obtain SQA qualifications.

If you are already approved to offer qualifications offered by another awarding body, which is in turn regulated by the government of the country in which you operate, and you can provide evidence of a successful quality assurance monitoring visit within the last twelve months relating to the subject and level for which approval is being sought, we may offer you an abbreviated approval process based on recognition of this.

Any school or centre based in Scotland that has been inspected by Her Majesty's Inspectorate for Education (HMIE) in connection with delivery of qualifications and has obtained full approval, may also request approval from SQA by quoting their SEED number. If accepted for approval, the SEED number will be confirmed by SQA as the approved centre number.

After you have achieved centre approval, we will monitor your progress in entering candidates for our qualifications. If you do not enter candidates within six months of obtaining centre approval, it is likely that we will contact you to discuss how we might assist you. If after one year of achieving centre approval no candidates have been entered for any of our qualifications, we reserve the right to remove centre approval.

Help available before you apply for approval

If you are thinking of applying for approval as a centre offering SQA qualifications, please call our Business Development and Customer Support Team on 0303 333 0330. The staff will be able to answer any initial queries you might have about approval, and if you wish, will arrange for a Business Development Manager (BDM) to contact you. The BDM will be able to tell you about the full range of SQA qualifications and, when you are ready, provide approval application forms and help you complete them.

You can ask for a development visit from one or more of our External Verifiers (EVs) before applying for approval to offer a specific qualification. The EV will be able to advise you on the resources you will need and, for Vocational

Qualifications, discuss the assessment strategies for assessing the qualifications. We make a small charge for this service. To find out more, or to request a development visit, ask our Customer Contact Centre on 0845 279 1000 to connect you to our Qualifications Approval and Verification Team.

You should make sure you have the current specifications for the qualifications you wish to offer before you make your application for approval. Our Customer Contact Centre will be able to help you with finding information on current Units or ordering copies of our publications.

We realise that you will have your own concerns about the approval process. We aim to provide all the assistance we can to make sure that your application for approval is successful. Don't hesitate to ask — we are here to help.

3 Applying for approval as an SQA centre

This section tells you what sort of evidence you will need to satisfy us that you can meet the criteria for approval as a centre, including your systems for internal verification. It concentrates on the approval application form, and gives advice on the information we are looking for to allow us to fully consider your application.

If you are already approved as an SQA centre, you may wish to skip this section and go directly to Section 4 on page 15 which deals with approval to offer qualifications.

The role of the SQA Co-ordinator: The person you nominate for this role within your centre is the primary point of contact between your centre and SQA (including arrangements for obtaining approval). Once your centre is approved to offer your first qualification, your SQA Co-ordinator will be responsible for ensuring that other functions are carried out. These will include:

- ◆ liaising with all sections in the centre involved in the delivery and assessment of SQA qualifications
- ◆ maintaining candidate records
- ◆ sending us candidate registration and entry information
- ◆ notifying us of candidates' results
- ◆ sending candidate evidence to us for central verification, when requested by us
- ◆ ensuring that visiting Quality Enhancement Managers (QEMs) and EVs have access to all necessary materials, evidence and, where applicable, sites where assessment will take place

Additional sites: Sometimes centres need to be able to assess qualifications at more than one location. For example:

- ◆ the headquarters of the organisation may be the approved centre but it will offer the qualification throughout its branches
- ◆ a training provider may deliver the qualification on employers' premises

We deal with **the centre** — not the site — for all quality assurance arrangements, including candidate entries. However, in your application, you should list the addresses of *all* sites involved in the delivery of SQA qualifications including sites overseas if applicable.

Your quality assurance systems must extend to any site involved in the delivery of the qualification. It will be your responsibility to ensure that a **single internal verification system** operates across the group of sites, ensuring a common assessment standard across all sites and all assessors.

Visits for initial approval as an SQA centre will normally take place at the main centre, but we reserve the right to visit any site. It should be noted that, if we have to visit centres and sites outwith Scotland for approval or quality assurance purposes, travel and subsistence costs for such visits will be charged to the centre. Daily fees will also be charged for overseas visits.

Sometimes it will not be possible to identify sites at the time of making your approval application. If this is the case, you should have a checklist of criteria which you will use to select sites.

Site selection checklists: These checklists should include confirmation that, for each site:

- ◆ there is a safe and healthy environment for candidates, staff and visitors
- ◆ there is a commitment to your centre's equal opportunities policy in terms of access to, and assessment of, qualifications being delivered
- ◆ candidates have access to the appropriate equipment, materials and staff for the qualifications being delivered and assessed
- ◆ there will be access for assessors, internal verifiers and SQA personnel, as appropriate
- ◆ candidates and/or staff will be given sufficient time to attend relevant meetings

The checklist should also include space for the signature of a senior person from the main centre as confirmation that the site meets the SQA approval criteria and that quality assurance will be maintained.

Partnerships: We also recognise multi-centre relationships, in which two or more centres collaborate in the delivery of a qualification but each centre enters candidates separately for SQA qualifications. In such a relationship, since each centre in the group takes responsibility for entry of its own candidates, SQA deals with each as a separate centre for quality assurance and certification.

Our publication *Managing School-College Partnerships* may be of interest to schools and colleges. Please contact our Customer Contact Centre at **customer@sqa.org.uk** if you wish to receive a copy. If you have any queries about offering our qualifications in partnership with another agency please contact our Qualifications Approval and Verification Team.

Qualification approval: We expect you to apply for centre approval and approval to offer your first qualification, at the same time. We will provide you with a centre number when your centre and first qualification applications have both been successful.

If you already have a copy of the centre and qualification approval form, it will be helpful if you can refer to it as you read the following sections.

First steps: completing the application form for approval as an SQA centre

The first thing to do if you want approval as an SQA centre is to contact our Business Development and Customer Support Team who will arrange for a Business Development Manager (BDM) to contact you. The BDM will advise on the viability of your proposal to become an approved centre and provide you with a combined centre and qualifications application form. You only need to complete this form if your centre is **not** already approved as an SQA centre. It is likely that a Quality Enhancement Manager will then visit your centre, complete a report on the systems that you have in place and let you know if you meet the requirements to allow your centre to offer SQA qualifications. However, you must also obtain approval to offer your initial qualification before we can provide you with a centre number and systems to allow us to share information on candidate registrations, entries and results.

In some instances, we may ask the External Verifier visiting your centre in connection with your initial qualification-approval request to also report on your readiness for centre approval. This may allow the QEM to make a decision on centre approval without actually having to visit your centre.

You should consider the following before completing the form:

- ◆ Has an appropriate member of staff been appointed as SQA Co-ordinator?
- ◆ Can you provide us with details of your organisation's structure and show how it relates to the delivery of SQA qualifications? Does this show the lines of responsibility and support for both staff and candidates?
- ◆ Is your centre's administrative support adequate for implementing the necessary systems?
- ◆ Do you have a procedure or plan to ensure that there are sufficient numbers of trainers, assessors, and internal verifiers for the anticipated number of candidates?

The headings shown in bold type below correspond to headings on the approval application form.

Tell us about your organisation

The first section of the form asks for information about your centre.

It asks for three names: Head of Centre, SQA Co-ordinator and Finance contact (these can be the same person).

We also ask you to tell us if you have attained the quality standards set by other agencies and, if so, when you were last audited by them.

Internal verification: A centre must have an internal verification system to ensure that:

- ◆ results are consistent between assessors where more than one assessor assesses the same Unit
- ◆ assessors' judgements are consistent for different candidates
- ◆ assessment and recording procedures are followed
- ◆ evidence of assessment is available for the EV

Your internal verification procedures should ensure that:

- ◆ The roles and responsibilities of all those involved in the assessment and internal verification process are documented.
- ◆ All learning and assessment materials used for the qualifications are subject to a system of internal verification.
- ◆ All assessors and internal verifiers involved in the qualification meet regularly to agree and familiarise themselves with the materials to be used, and to establish consistency of interpretation and assessment of the standards. These meetings will take place before, during and after the assessment of the qualification. (The purpose of these meetings is to ensure that appropriate assessment materials are available before delivery, to monitor consistency of assessment decisions during delivery, and to review assessment practice after delivery.)
- ◆ All items to be discussed are set down in an agenda and decisions and action points are recorded in the minutes.
- ◆ There is a statement of the methods used by the centre's internal verifiers, eg:
 - sampling assessments to monitor consistency, eg cross-marking
 - countersigning of assessment records kept by the assessors
 - observing a sample of assessments to monitor their consistency, eg dual assessment
 - supporting assessors by offering guidance and advice

An internal verifier can, of course, also act as an assessor, but cannot internally verify assessment evidence from a candidate if he or she is involved in assessing that candidate. In such cases another internal verifier must do the verification. The internal verifier will also be responsible for implementing the centre's appeals procedure to settle any disputes between candidates and assessors.

Centres must have an internal verification (IV) review system to ensure that:

- ◆ the IV system is monitored effectively
- ◆ any necessary changes are implemented

Details of previous experience as an approved centre

This section is used to let us know if your centre has ever been an approved centre of another awarding body and, if so, if centre or qualification approval has ever been withdrawn or suspended. It also provides an opportunity for you to tell us if you are already experienced in offering relevant qualifications, perhaps with another awarding body. Finally, the information provided should help us understand the extent of any partnership arrangements that you intend to use or have already put in place.

Tell us about your systems and how you plan to operate

This section of the form asks you to describe the systems that you will have put in place to meet the criteria for approval as an SQA centre and for internal verification. During the approval visit, the QEM will look at the evidence which supports your answers and will expect to see documented policies and procedures. This may be a full quality manual, or simply a description of what activities are to be carried out, in what sequence, and by whom.

Managing, reviewing and continuously seeking to improve quality assurance processes: Things you should consider at this point include:

- ◆ Will you be able to gather feedback so that you can monitor and review the operation of your systems, to ensure continued compliance with our criteria and continuous improvement?

Evidence to support this part of the application could include:

- ◆ an organisational chart naming staff in key roles and showing lines of responsibility and support
- ◆ descriptions of responsibilities in relation to SQA qualifications for members of staff
- ◆ reference to existing systems which support the delivery of other qualifications and/or training
- ◆ your arrangements for internal review of quality assurance (eg internal audit procedures)

Management of information within the centre and between the centre and SQA: We require all centres to have systems in place to:

- ◆ ensure that information is transferred between the centre and SQA at the appropriate times
- ◆ store and disseminate information on SQA qualifications, policies and procedures to all relevant staff
- ◆ retain information on candidates, including addresses, in a manner that complies with current data protection legislation

- ◆ establish if candidates already have Scottish Candidate Numbers (SCNs) and ensure that these are used for all entries; where necessary, allocate new SCNs to candidates not already registered with SQA

Evidence to support this part of the application could include:

- ◆ designated member of staff (SQA Co-ordinator?) to be responsible for the distribution of information and roles and responsibilities of staff with respect to record keeping
- ◆ details of methods of storing information, eg paper filing system, information centre, staff resource base or computer database — including information on where records are to be kept, eg in a central location in the workplace, or by individual members of staff
- ◆ arrangements for secure storage of records and assessment material; and appropriate disposal when no longer required
- ◆ procedures for the distribution of mail, and any other documentation from SQA, designed to ensure that staff involved in a qualification are kept informed of any matters which affect its delivery and assessment
- ◆ details of your management information system, eg staff meetings and staff notice boards
- ◆ procedures for collecting candidate information and ensuring that candidates have given consent to sharing personal data with SQA under the terms of the Data Protection Act (1998)
- ◆ entering candidates for qualifications in accordance with timescales published by SQA
- ◆ ensuring candidates' records are maintained, including information on candidates' progress

Management of resources: Your staff recruitment, induction and development policies must be designed to ensure that you have enough qualified staff to meet the requirements of all qualifications on offer. You must also have a system for ensuring that all staff who will assess and internally verify qualifications are, and continue to be, appropriately qualified/experienced. The system should include continuing professional development (CPD) where appropriate. Your staff should be given adequate opportunity for their own development and there should be a system for establishing their requirements.

The SQA Co-ordinator must ensure that relevant staff information is made available and forwarded to SQA in support of approval applications. This information will be returned to you after scrutiny. After approval has been obtained, there is no need to send information on staff changes to SQA as the EV will ask for this information during verification visits.

It is your responsibility to ensure that you have sufficient resources to enable all candidates to achieve the competences defined in our qualifications. This applies to all sites where the qualification is to be offered. 'Resources' in this context means staff, accommodation, equipment, and materials.

Evidence to support this part of your application could include:

- ◆ a system for identifying the qualifications and experience required by staff involved in the delivery and assessment of SQA qualifications
- ◆ a system for the induction of staff into their roles as assessors and internal verifiers in your centre
- ◆ a staff development and review system
- ◆ roles and responsibilities of staff in allocating and reviewing resources
- ◆ checklists to ensure that resources are adequate at all sites where the qualification is to be offered
- ◆ procedures for accessing resources
- ◆ your plans or policy for providing learning materials, eg standard texts, handouts, videos, working instructions/procedures
- ◆ your plans or policy for providing reference materials, eg professional journals, company reports, codes of practice, British Standards
- ◆ resources for assessment

Financial viability: We will seek information about your centre's financial viability. Banks will only reply to enquiries with the express consent of the customer concerned, so it helps us if you complete and return the form entitled 'Private and Confidential — Status Enquiry and Consent Form' which we send out with the application form.

Management of external quality assurance: SQA deploys EVs to sample the work of your candidates to check that the qualifications are being assessed in a manner that maintains national standards.

The way this works is that we will always visit centres actively offering Vocational Qualifications at least once annually. For other types of qualification, the EVs may either visit your centre or we will ask you to send us evidence of candidate attainment for a sample of candidates (chosen by us) to be verified at a central event.

Qualification block	Central verification	Visiting verification
National Qualifications	Yes	Yes
Higher National Qualifications	Graded Units only	Yes
Vocational Qualifications	No	Yes

Evidence to support this part of your application could include:

- ◆ the name of the person who is responsible for the co-ordination of all external verification visits (normally the SQA Co-ordinator)
- ◆ an outline of the procedures to be followed to ensure that assessment materials are available when the EV visits — this is especially important when the centre consists of more than one site
- ◆ a system to ensure that staff understand this process and SQA requirements, including those relating to how long you need to retain candidate evidence
- ◆ a system to ensure that action is taken as the result of any feedback from our external verification processes

Management of candidates: Centres must have induction, guidance and support systems for candidates.

It is your responsibility to ensure that candidates are given adequate support from their initial entry through to certification. You should provide details of the systems of induction, guidance and support that you have set up for your candidates. Candidates should know and understand:

- ◆ the roles and responsibilities of staff in delivering SQA qualifications
- ◆ the background to the qualification
- ◆ the application and benefits of the qualification
- ◆ the requirements of the qualification
- ◆ the training and support available
- ◆ the processes for assessment, review, guidance, evidence-gathering and portfolio-development (if applicable)
- ◆ the process for assessment arrangements, including arrangements for candidates with disabilities
- ◆ the recording and certification systems

Evidence to support this part of your application could include: a handbook for candidates which, in addition to the information about the course (see previous paragraph) could include information on:

- ◆ health and safety
- ◆ appeals system
- ◆ equal opportunities policy
- ◆ information on the centre
- ◆ information on staff, ie roles and responsibilities of assessors, internal verifiers and mentors, expert witnesses
- ◆ candidates' responsibilities for gathering evidence

You should be able to demonstrate your commitment to equal opportunities in the selection, admission and assessment of candidates.

Any centre offering SQA qualifications should ensure that everyone eligible has an equal chance of benefiting from the services it provides. You should provide details of your centre's equal opportunities policy and records that show that it is being followed. There may be instances where centres, by their nature, cannot operate equal opportunities policies — eg prisons, or centres where the provision is aimed at a specific group of people. In these instances we will respect your circumstances but we will ask you to supply details on the form so we can make a reasonable judgement about how you are addressing the criteria for access and equal opportunities.

A centre must have a documented procedure for **dealing with complaints** from candidates on matters not directly involving assessment decisions.

Appeals: If a candidate disagrees with an assessment decision, he or she should have the right to appeal. He or she should know the grounds on which an appeal can be made, and the procedure for doing so. You should provide details on the centre's appeals procedure. The procedure should:

- ◆ state that the appeals process will be managed by the centre
- ◆ set out the basis on which appeals may be made
- ◆ outline the steps to be followed in conducting an appeal (see below)
- ◆ ensure the maintenance of full records at each stage (ie the nature of the appeal, persons involved and dates of discussions and meetings, and the decision reached) as evidence that an appeal has been processed

It will help you and the candidate to have set timescales within which each stage of an appeal will be processed.

There should be at least three stages in your procedure:

- ◆ Initially, the assessor should deal with any concern about assessment.
- ◆ If the matter has been discussed and no satisfactory outcome has been achieved, the candidate and assessor should refer the matter to the internal verifier identified by the centre.
- ◆ If no satisfactory outcome has been achieved after this discussion, the candidate may appeal to an independent third party. This could be another internal verifier not previously involved in the delivery of training, assessment or internal verification of the candidate, or a named individual from within or from outside the centre with a broad expertise in the qualification area. SQA does not participate in this or any other stage of a centre's appeals process.

Details of your appeals procedure should be enclosed with the application form.

Supplementary information: The documents you need to send with your application form are:

- ◆ completed Financial Status Enquiry Consent form
- ◆ your appeals procedure for candidates

- ◆ your equal opportunities policy
- ◆ your health and safety policy
- ◆ your internal verification procedures

And, if appropriate:

- ◆ your site selection checklist
- ◆ awarding body letter of approval

It is not necessary to send anything else with your application — the QEM will discuss details of your documented policies and procedures with you on the day of the approval visit and compile a report of his or her findings for us.

Now go to Section 4 to obtain information on how to complete the section of your application dealing with qualification approval.

4 Approval to offer a specific qualification

This section of the guide tells you what sort of evidence you will need to satisfy us that you can meet the criteria for approval to offer a specific qualification.

First steps: your application

We may need to visit your centre in connection with your application, particularly if you are seeking to offer your first qualification in a particular subject area. However, an approval visit may not be necessary if your application has been satisfactorily completed and:

- ◆ your centre has experience of offering SQA qualifications in the same subject area
- ◆ external verification carried out recently in the same subject area has confirmed that national standards are being achieved
- ◆ for National Qualifications, you are using material from the National Assessment Bank, where available, or your own assessment material which has already been accepted under the 'Prior Verification' system

If you wish to offer a National Course that includes external assessment in the form of an examination, and you have not offered a National Course before, we ask you to notify us on form CRITG which can be obtained from our website or from the Qualifications Approval and Verification Team. There is more information about this in Section 6 (page 26).

Schools and other centres that have successfully obtained full centre approval from HMIE, as evidenced by having a SEED number, will be automatically approved to offer a range of National Qualifications. Similarly, Special Schools that have a SEED number may use an abbreviated approval process to become approved to offer any of the qualifications on the 'automatically approved' list.

Completing the application form for approval to offer SQA qualifications

Before you make your application you should make sure you have the current version of the specifications for Awards/Courses and Units that you wish to offer. For a current publications list, further information on current qualifications, and to order copies of any publications, call our Customer Contact Centre on 0845 279 1000.

We have developed a checklist to help you ensure that you have filled in the sections of the form that are relevant to your application. The checklist is designed to help you fill in the sections relevant to your particular application. See Appendix 1 (page 30).

Select your application form

The table below will help you to select the correct form when applying for approval to offer any of our qualifications.

Centre already approved by SQA	Centre approved by another awarding body	Qualifications approval held with another awarding body	Recognition route to approval	Approval form
No	No	N/A	N/A	Combined CA1 & SA1
No	Yes	No	N/A	Combined CA1 & SA1
No	Yes	Yes	Yes	CA1 & SA1 Recognition
Yes	N/A	No	N/A	SA1
Yes	N/A	Yes	Yes	SA1 Recognition

Note: Combined CA1 & SA1 forms (and Recognition versions) are provided by our Business Development and Support Team. Form SA1 (and SA1 Recognition) can be downloaded from SQA's website.

Type of qualification

Assuming that you have already completed the cover sheet with details about your centre, you now need to tick the appropriate boxes for the type of qualifications you wish to offer. You may wish to refer to the introduction on page 1 to see how your particular qualification fits into any particular qualification block.

If you intend offering Vocational Qualifications, you first of all need to obtain a copy of the relevant Sector Skills Council (SSC) Assessment Strategy so that you will be in a position to 'check' the box to indicate that you intend to meet all of its requirements. You should indicate which version of the assessment strategy you have so that we can confirm that you are using the latest version.

You do not need to submit separate forms for qualifications in the same subject or occupational areas, even if they are drawn from different qualification blocks (NQs, HNAs, or VQs). You should submit separate forms for qualifications in different subject or occupational areas, as details on the resources used to deliver the qualifications will differ.

For example, if you want to offer:

- ◆ SVQ in Accounting at level 2

and

- ◆ HNC in Accounting

then one form is acceptable.

On the other hand, if you want to offer:

- ◆ SVQ in Amenity Horticulture

and

- ◆ SVQ in Fisheries Management

then you should submit two separate forms.

If you are in doubt, please call the Qualifications Approval and Verification Team for advice.

Documents submitted with this application

If you are sending any supporting documentation, please list it here. If you have insufficient space in any part of this form, please continue on a separate sheet, and list all the extra sheets in this section.

Qualification details

A separate page should be used for each Course/Award. For each qualification, please give:

- ◆ the full title of the qualification, eg SVQ Accounting
- ◆ the level, eg level 2 (for an SVQ), HNC (for HN), Intermediate 1 (for NQ), and the qualification number
- ◆ the numbers and titles of the individual Units which you wish to offer, using the '4+2' SQA code numbers

Details of previous experience of assessment in this qualification area

This applies to the qualification approval application form only as you will have already provided this information in the combined centre and qualification form. If you have experience of assessing SQA qualifications in this subject area, please list the relevant details here. This will enable us to process your application quickly, and, if possible, without making a visit.

Resources to be used to support the assessment of the qualification(s)

Accommodation: This section of the form asks you to supply details of the resources you intend to use to support the assessment of the qualification(s). It is important that you are familiar with the content of the Units that make up the qualification(s) before completing this part of the application.

Your centre should provide an environment which helps candidates to achieve the qualification(s) and which ensures that technical and specialist needs are covered. If you are using any sites for the delivery and assessment of the qualification(s) that you do not own or operate, please send us your site selection checklist if you have not already done so as part of your centre approval application. Topics for inclusion in a site selection checklist may be found on page 6.

Equipment: If you intend to use shared resources (eg specialised reference materials and equipment), please describe the arrangements and provide evidence that agreement has been obtained from the owners of the resources. We need to be sure that you have sufficient equipment to allow every candidate to meet the requirements of the qualification.

Hardware and software to be used for e-assessment

If you intend using e-assessment, you need to describe how this will operate, taking account of the following:

- ◆ how you will ensure that there is sufficient access to hardware for assessment purposes
- ◆ the software used for assessment meets SQA specifications and standards (see e-assessment page on SQA website)
- ◆ a system to record assessment conditions and attainment for every candidate
- ◆ a system for password-protecting assessment material, authenticating candidate assessments, and ensuring that candidates do not have privileged access to other materials during assessment
- ◆ a contingency plan to cover system failures
- ◆ access to completed assessments by assessor, internal verifier and external verifier
- ◆ how candidates will be advised that computer-generated results are provisional until the verification process has been completed
- ◆ a policy for the retention of candidate evidence

Reference and learning materials

Reference and learning materials available to candidates could include:

- ◆ standard texts
- ◆ handouts
- ◆ videos
- ◆ case studies
- ◆ working instructions
- ◆ procedures and manuals
- ◆ technical publications
- ◆ professional journals
- ◆ codes of practice
- ◆ British Standards

Assessment materials

For **National Qualifications**, if you are using materials from the National Assessment Bank, you do not need to submit any further information about assessment materials.

You may wish to produce an assessment plan for centre-developed National Qualifications (with centre-developed assessment materials), Higher National Qualifications and Scottish Vocational Qualifications, or describe how you intend to assess candidates (ie the methods of assessment — observation in the workplace, practical exercises, role play, case studies, written and/or oral questions, simulation). An assessment plan should indicate which Units or Elements or series of Elements are to be assessed by your chosen methods of assessment.

Please remember that it is not necessary to assess each Performance Criterion separately — assessment of different Elements or Performance Criteria can and should be integrated (see SQA's *Guide to Assessment* for more details on this).

Please provide details if any assessment materials have been subject to prior verification. On the other hand, if you are using assessment materials which have not been verified by us, we would strongly advise that you to seek prior verification. This may be obtained at any time by forwarding your request along with the assessment materials to our Qualifications Approval and Verification Team who will provide feedback from a subject expert.

For all SQA qualification families, in order that we can assess your potential to deliver and assess the qualifications, we expect to see:

- ◆ fully expanded learning and assessment materials for all the Units you intend to offer during the first six months after being approved to offer the qualification — a minimum of six Units, or all Units if less than six

We require the same amount of evidence whether you are applying for approval to offer individual Units, a Course or a Group Award. If your application is for fewer than six Units, full evidence for all these Units must be provided, whatever the timescale for their delivery.

If you are applying for approval to offer an SVQ, and intend to offer candidates the opportunity to achieve the Units in any order, we will expect to see fully expanded learning and assessment materials for **all** the Units that you are applying to offer.

- ◆ For a practical task, give us a full description of the task with a checklist containing the skills which you expect to observe.
- ◆ For written questions, give us the full set of questions along with the solutions and marking scheme.

Additional evidence to support your application could include:

- ◆ an assessment schedule for a typical candidate indicating where integration could be achieved and the timing of assessments
- ◆ procedures for remediation and reassessment
- ◆ arrangements for accreditation of prior learning (APL)

Where some or all of the qualification is achieved through an integrated project or assignment (for example, Video Production or Fashion Design) or where candidate evidence is going to occur naturally through normal work tasks, it may be difficult for you to provide the sample of material outlined above. Please contact our Qualifications Approval and Verification Team if you need any help in deciding on an appropriate amount of evidence.

Criteria for internal verification

We need to know if you have prepared any assessment materials and, if so, if they have been subject to internal verification using your defined processes. We also need to know if the material is available for our External Verifier to see.

Please give us a brief description of how your centre's internal verification system applies to this qualification, and let us know how many candidates, assessors, and internal verifiers will be involved with the qualification.

Provision of assessors and internal verifiers

Staff information: Staff need to be:

- ◆ competent in the subject/occupational area to a level appropriate to the qualification
- ◆ competent in assessment (or internal verification) of the type involved in the qualification
- ◆ familiar with the procedures and documentation for the qualification

You should supply details of **all** members of staff who will be assessors and/or internal verifiers for the qualification. These details should include the names of staff members and the Units which each will be delivering and/or assessing. Where applicable, you should also give details of the site where the assessment will take place. Finally, you should identify which members of staff are internal verifiers and which are assessors. (Remember that internal verifiers cannot verify the assessment evidence for any candidate whom they have personally assessed.)

For each member of staff listed, you are asked to supply details of the qualifications and experience as they relate to the Units for which they are responsible. This information should be completed and signed by the member of staff, as confirmation to us that they are aware of their role in the qualification. Tell us where and when relevant qualifications were achieved or the work experience was gained. It would be helpful if you could give us brief outlines of the Courses or work experience undertaken, using full titles rather than abbreviations.

For Vocational Qualifications, assessors and internal verifiers should be competent to the standards defined by the appropriate Sector Skills Council (SSC). These are contained in the relevant Assessment Strategy document.

The Units which assessors and internal verifiers will be required to achieve to allow them to assess or internally verify Vocational Qualifications are:

- A1 Assess Candidates using a Range of Methods
- A2 Assess Candidates' Performance through Observation
- V1 Conduct Internal Quality Assurance of the Assessment Process

We recognise that staff may be working towards achievement of the A or V Units at the time of seeking approval to offer a qualification. Where this is the case, we will expect these qualifications to be obtained within a reasonable time and we will check progress towards achievement at subsequent monitoring visits.

Alternatively, those who assess these qualifications should hold Scottish teaching qualifications for secondary education or further education (**TQSE** or **TQFE**), which embrace these standards.

The following predecessor qualifications are also acceptable:

Assessors

D32 Assess Candidate Performance

and/or (depending on the nature of the assessment being conducted)

D33 Assess Candidate Performance Using Differing Sources of Evidence

Internal verifiers

D34 Internally Verify the Assessment Process. From April 2009, TQFE and TQSE are no longer acceptable as qualifications for internal verifiers of Vocational Qualifications unless the current assessment strategy produced by the relevant Sector Skills Council indicates that this is permissible.

Declaration

Your application should be signed and dated by one of the two people named at the start of the form (Head of Centre or SQA Co-ordinator). This should be a person with sufficient status and authority to be responsible for the quality of delivery and assessment of SQA qualifications throughout your centre. By signing this declaration, you are confirming that you will allow access to SQA personnel for the purpose of monitoring national standards, which is a condition of your approval as an SQA centre. The signature will also be regarded as agreement to pay all fees associated with the application. The application cannot be processed unless the form is signed.

5 Once you've sent in your application

You should send your completed application form, and any documentation that supports your application, to SQA's Centre Support Team. We will acknowledge receipt of your form. If we find that we need any more information, we will contact you by e-mail and ask your SQA Co-ordinator to provide it.

If you have already been approved by another awarding body, it may be possible for us to approve your centre without a visit. Our Qualifications Approval and Verification Team will be able to offer guidance about this.

Approval requiring a visit

Centre approval

When we have all the information that we need, we will contact your SQA Co-ordinator to arrange a convenient time for a QEM to visit you. The QEM will look for evidence that your centre has the **potential** to meet the criteria for approval as an SQA centre.

At the end of the visit, the QEM will give your SQA Co-ordinator a verbal report on the findings of the visit, outlining the decisions and providing details of any further actions needed before approval can be granted — or recommendations to enhance your provision if your application has been approved. Written confirmation will be provided to your SQA Co-ordinator within one week of the visit.

Qualification approval

Our Qualifications Approval and Verification Team will arrange a convenient date and time to visit your SQA Co-ordinator and confirm the arrangements by post or e-mail. A visit will be conducted by an EV for each subject area. If several EVs need to visit you at the same time, they are likely to be accompanied by a QEM.

NB As the EV(s) will be compiling reports during their approval visits, it would be very helpful if you could provide somewhere private where they can do this.

EVs will look for evidence that your centre has the **potential** to meet the criteria for approval to offer a specific qualification.

At the end of the visit, the verifier(s) will give a short verbal report to your SQA Co-ordinator on their recommendations regarding approval to offer specific qualifications. The recommendations are then passed to the Qualifications Approval and Verification Team who make the final decision.

We will confirm our decision in writing to your SQA Co-ordinator.

You will be allocated a centre number when both your centre approval and first specific qualification application have been successfully achieved. You should use this number on all the forms and documentation that you submit to SQA.

Approval decisions

Approved

This means that we consider your centre to have the potential to support the delivery and assessment of SQA qualifications. We may make recommendations concerning your systems to help you enhance your delivery and assessment of these qualifications. If this is the first time your centre has been approved to offer a qualification, we will send you a 'starter pack'.

Not Yet Approved

We will make this decision if we think that your centre is not yet able to meet one or more of the approval criteria. For example, because:

- ◆ there is a lack of documented procedures, or
- ◆ there is no appeals procedure, or
- ◆ specialised equipment is not available, or
- ◆ learning materials are inadequate, or
- ◆ assessments do not measure the stated Performance Criteria

The letter informing your SQA Co-ordinator of the decision will include an offer of further assistance from SQA.

You will be asked to provide more evidence of your centre's ability to meet the approval criteria. Depending on the nature of the evidence requested, the QEM or EV may have to make a return visit. Your centre will not be approved until SQA is sure that these conditions have been met.

You have the right to appeal against a decision that you consider inappropriate. You should, in the first instance, either telephone or write to the Qualifications Approval and Verification Team, who will send you details of our appeals procedure.

What happens after approval

When you have received formal approval from us as a centre, including your first approval to offer specific SQA qualifications, you can start to enter candidates for our qualifications. We will regularly monitor your quality assurance in relation to our qualifications but the monitoring frequency may be reduced as you become more experienced and provide a record of satisfactory delivery and assessment of our qualifications.

Your QEM will visit you to ensure that your systems are fulfilling their potential, and will monitor your compliance with our quality assurance criteria. You will receive a copy of the QEM's monitoring report. If there are problems in your quality assurance systems, your QEM will clearly identify what the problems are and will advise you on how to tackle them. If the problems are serious, and are in danger of compromising candidate attainment, the QEM will recommend an action plan detailing what needs to be done and laying down strict timescales for you to adhere to. We will provide advice and support during this time. If you cannot carry out the required action in the agreed timescale, we reserve the right to remove SQA approval from your centre.

If your centre name, Head of Centre or SQA Co-ordinator changes, you must notify us immediately so that we can update our records. Similarly, if your organisation is sold or taken over by another organisation, you must let us know.

Our external verification process samples candidate attainment in a variety of ways. If you are offering Vocational Qualifications, you will receive monitoring visits from EVs including a free development visit six months after obtaining your first specific qualification approval. (This method is also used when candidate evidence from our National Qualifications is not suitable for central verification.) You will receive a copy of the EV's report to SQA. Should problems be encountered, we will not be able to certificate your candidates until these have been rectified. We will monitor reports made by EVs to check whether overall quality assurance issues are arising — if they are, this may prompt a visit from your QEM. We do not charge you for visits from our QEMs and EVs if we have initiated these.

If you need help, you can ask for a development visit from either a QEM or an EV. We make a charge for such requested visits. Details of the current costs can be obtained by telephoning our Qualifications Approval and Verification Team.

If, after you have achieved approval to offer a specific qualification, you do not enter candidates within six months of being approved, we may contact you to discuss what we can do to help you. We reserve the right to remove approval to offer any specific qualification if a centre does not enter candidates for it, or any other qualifications in the same verification group, within twelve months of being approved.

6 External assessment

If you wish to offer a National Course which includes external assessment in the form of an examination, and you have not offered a National Course before, you should notify us on form CRITG which can be obtained from SQA's Qualifications Approval and Verification Team.

There are strict requirements for centres wishing to act as examination centres for the externally-assessed components of National Qualifications, such as Highers. These are fully covered in *Conditions and Arrangements for National Qualifications*.

Centres wishing to offer qualifications with an external assessment can enter candidates for those external examinations themselves or through another approved SQA centre, eg a school or college. If you are using another centre, we ask you to confirm that you have written evidence from this centre that they will accommodate your candidates.

If you wish to conduct external assessment on your own premises, we will need to carry out a separate approval process. We require systems to be in place and equipment to be available at the time of approval. This is because any irregularity in the conduct of an external examination can have a serious impact on all candidates taking the examination, not just those in your centre.

In approving you to offer external examinations, we consider the examination room(s), supplementary facilities and equipment, staffing, and your procedures for dealing with secure storage and handling of examination papers and candidates' completed examination scripts. We ask centres to nominate invigilators, and we then appoint invigilators to your centre. We have strict criteria for eligibility to be an SQA invigilator.

Accommodation

You will be asked to state the maximum number of candidates you can accommodate for an examination, and to show that your accommodation meets the following minimum criteria:

For each room to be used as an examination room:

- ◆ the floor is level, and there are no galleries
- ◆ there is no material displayed on the walls at the time of the examination
- ◆ there are sufficient single desks or tables and chairs for the number of candidates stated, and these are consecutively numbered
- ◆ there is a minimum space of 1.25 metres between rows of desks, to minimise any chance of copying or collusion
- ◆ rooms for candidates taking practical tests are suitably equipped

Supplementary facilities and equipment

You should also show us that:

- ◆ lighting levels are appropriate
- ◆ heating and ventilation are appropriate, and can be controlled
- ◆ there is a working clock, clearly visible to all candidates
- ◆ there are blinds or other means of controlling sunlight through windows
- ◆ you have taken steps to avoid possible sources of extraneous noise, eg traffic noise, building noise, noisy processes in adjacent rooms, movement of large numbers of people past the examination room, telephone in the examination room
- ◆ there is access for disabled candidates to both the centre and the examination rooms
- ◆ there are toilet facilities for male and female candidates, and for candidates with disabilities

Invigilators

We will invite you to nominate invigilators for our examinations. We will appoint invigilators to your centre. You will need one invigilator for every 35 candidates (or for every room, where rooms accommodate fewer than 35 candidates). We will appoint a chief invigilator: this person will have at least one year's experience of invigilation. Once we have informed you of the name of your chief invigilator, you will be responsible for ensuring that there is effective communication between the chief invigilator and your centre (see 'Management of information' below).

Further information regarding the selection and appointment of chief invigilators, deputy chief invigilators and invigilators may be obtained from the Appointee Management /Invigilator information section of SQA's website.

Management of information

As well as your systems for communicating registration and entry data about candidates to SQA, you will need to show us that you have systems in place to enable you to submit estimates of performance for each candidate and to make formal appeals on candidate results in external examinations, backed by evidence from candidates' course work.

We will check your systems for distributing information on examination timetables and procedures to candidates, and for ensuring that they understand the criteria against which they will be assessed and the form of assessment to be used.

You will need to show us that there are clear lines of communication between the invigilator and the person in the centre responsible for the:

- ◆ conduct of examinations and procedures
- ◆ circulation of examination-related material from SQA
- ◆ distribution of stationery and equipment prior to the examination

There are specific requirements for individual examinations, which are detailed in our *Handbook for Invigilators*. We need to be sure that candidates in your centre receive the appropriate stationery and equipment for their examinations, eg protractors, A3 or square-ruled paper, atlases, and so on.

In addition, you will need to show us that you have secure overnight storage facilities in your centre for candidate scripts after examinations have taken place.

Further details can be obtained from the Qualifications Approval and Verification Team.

Further help and information

Please remember that we will always be very happy to assist you as you go through the process of becoming an SQA centre and gaining approval to offer specific SQA qualifications.

If you have any questions, please contact the Business Development and Customer Support Team and ask to be put in touch with the member of staff who has responsibility for supporting centres in your local area. He or she will be able to give you detailed information about the approval process, the people involved, the timescales, and any additional support you need.

Appendix 1: specific qualification approval checklist

This checklist is supplied to help you to ensure that you have filled in the sections of the form which are relevant to your application.

Please tick the appropriate box to show that you have filled in the relevant part of the form and attached additional documents, if needed.	Approval submission
COVER SHEET	
Centre name	
Centre number	
Name of main contact for this submission	
Telephone number of main contact	
Qualification title and code	
Type of application — appropriate box ticked on cover sheet	
Full list of documents included with your submission	
Declaration signed and dated (your submission will not be processed without this)	
SECTION 1	
Full title of qualification	
Level of qualification	
Qualification code	
Unit code(s) and full Unit title(s)	
SECTION 2	
Details of previous experience of assessment in this qualification area	
SECTION 3	
Resources	
Assessment material for NQs	
Assessment materials for HNQs/SVQs	
Details of internal verification for this qualification	
List of verifiers/assessors for this qualification	
List of sites (if applicable)	
Site selection checklist appended if not already sent to SQA	
Staff qualification information	

Appendix 2: Approval duties of Business Development Managers, Quality Enhancement Managers and External Verifiers

Business Development Managers (BDMs) are experts in our range of qualifications and operate within a particular geographical area.

BDMs will:

- ◆ describe what is involved in becoming a centre approved to offer SQA qualifications
- ◆ help you decide which qualifications you may initially wish to offer
- ◆ when you are ready, provide assistance and support to help you complete your application forms
- ◆ after you are an approved centre, advise you on subsequent qualifications that you may wish to offer

Quality Enhancement Managers (QEMs) are specialists in auditing quality assurance systems, and are responsible for groups of centres in one geographical area (Dumfries and Galloway, for instance). This allows them to become familiar with the centres in their area, to get to know the members of staff and to provide continuity in monitoring the operation of centres' quality systems for delivery and assessment of SQA qualifications.

You are likely to come into contact with QEMs during the approval process as they:

- ◆ scrutinise your application for initial approval as an SQA centre
- ◆ visit your centre to check that you can meet the criteria for initial approval, including the criteria for internal verification
- ◆ prepare an initial evaluation report on you as a prospective SQA centre
- ◆ decide if you can be approved as a centre able to offer SQA qualifications
- ◆ decide on lifting any conditions imposed on approval, based on evidence that you have provided
- ◆ support EVs on visits to your centre, where this is required

External Verifiers (EVs) are subject specialists. Each is responsible for the SQA qualifications in a subject area known as a verification group.

EVs will:

- ◆ visit your centre, at our request, to check that you are meeting the SQA criteria for approval to offer specific qualifications
- ◆ check your internal verification procedures as they apply to the delivery and assessment of specific qualifications
- ◆ make recommendations to SQA on the approval of your centre to offer specific qualifications
- ◆ consider evidence for lifting any conditions imposed on approval
- ◆ visit your centre, at your request, to offer development advice — a charge is normally made for visits initiated by a centre