



Systems and Qualification Approval Guide

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Introduction

Who is this guide for?

This guide describes how to become an SQA centre and how to obtain approval to offer SQA qualification(s). It should be of help to all potential new centres as well as to SQA's existing centres. These include:

- ◆ colleges, schools and training providers
- ◆ private and public sector organisations
- ◆ international training providers/organisations

What does this guide cover?

Part A: Systems approval focuses on what an SQA centre requires for its core systems.

Part B: Qualification approval covers qualification approval procedures and practice.

Both parts relate to the following SQA qualifications:

- ◆ Higher National Certificates and Diplomas (HNC/HND)
- ◆ National Qualifications (other than new National Qualifications)
- ◆ Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQ)
- ◆ Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) Units
- ◆ Customised Awards (CA)
- ◆ Professional Development Awards (PDA)
- ◆ International Vocational Awards (IVA)

How to use this guide

This guide should be used in conjunction with the Systems and Qualification Approval Application Forms. It explains the evidence requirements (and points to sources of information) that centres will need in order to address SQA's Quality Assurance Criteria.

SQA's Quality Assurance Criteria are grouped under six categories:

- ◆ Management of a centre
- ◆ Resources
- ◆ Candidate support
- ◆ Internal assessment and verification
- ◆ External assessment
- ◆ Data management

Full information on the quality assurance criteria can be found on SQA's quality assurance web pages.

Approval: an overview

Centres must seek and obtain approval before offering SQA qualifications.

There are two types of approval:

- ◆ systems approval
- ◆ qualification approval

Systems approval confirms that your centre has the management and quality assurance systems to support the delivery, assessment and internal verification of SQA qualifications, irrespective of what qualification(s) you intend to offer.

Qualification approval confirms that your centre has the staff, reference materials, learning materials, assessment materials, equipment and accommodation needed to deliver, assess and internally verify the qualifications listed on your application.

To offer your first qualification, you must apply for systems approval and qualification approval (for at least one qualification) at the same time.

When systems and qualification approval have been granted, you will be given an SQA centre number and guidance on how to enter candidates.

After you have gained systems approval, you only need to seek qualification approval when you want to offer additional qualifications. You can apply for approval to offer additional qualifications at any time.

You will have to show that your centre continues to meet SQA's Quality Assurance Criteria as you deliver and assess your qualification(s). We routinely monitor all our approved centres to ensure that they continue to have the necessary management and quality assurance systems and that they meet the assessment and internal verification requirements for the qualifications being offered. This is known as verification. Please refer to SQA's quality assurance web pages for more information about systems and qualification verification.

SQA will monitor your progress in entering candidates. If you do not enter candidates within six months of obtaining centre approval, we may contact you to discuss how we might assist you. We reserve the right to withdraw centre approval if no candidates have been entered for any of our qualifications after one year of receiving centre approval.

Help available before you apply for approval

For **centres in the UK**, if you wish to apply for approval or you want to find out more about SQA's approval process, please call our Business Development and Customer Support team on 0303 333 0330 or e-mail mycentre@sqa.org.uk.

For **international centres** please call our Regional Managers on +44 (0) 141 282 6500 or e-mail sqainternational@sqa.org.uk.

We realise that you may have questions about the approval process. Our staff will be able to answer any initial queries you might have about approval and, if you wish, will arrange for a member of the Business Development team to contact you. They 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.

For further information on the approval process, SQA's Quality Assurance Criteria and the role of the approvers please visit the quality assurance section of SQA's website.

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.

Part A: Systems approval

Note: If you are already an approved SQA centre, you do not need to complete the Systems Approval Application Form, which is covered in Part A of this guidance document. Please go straight to Part B: Qualification approval, for guidance on how to complete the Qualification Approval Application Forms.

The first section of the Systems Approval Application Form asks you about the details of your organisation.

Systems Approval Application Form reference

A1: Centre contact details: Please provide the main postal address of your centre. This will be retained by SQA once your centre has been approved.

A2: Key contact points: Please provide relevant contacts for specific topics. This will allow efficient communication.

A3: Additional centre information: With your permission, SQA will provide your centre information to candidates who ask us to help them find centres that offer particular qualifications.

A4: Current approval status: Please provide details of other awarding bodies that you are approved by to offer qualifications.

A5: Quality assurance standards: Please provide details of any quality assurance standards that your centre uses. This will help us to understand your approach to quality assurance.

A6: Prior approval refusals, withdrawals, or sanctions imposed: Please provide us with details if another awarding body has refused or withdrawn approval from your centre, or if you have had sanctions imposed. Failure to disclose this information may have an impact on the processing of your approval application.

A7: Previous experience in assessing qualifications or training: Please provide an overview of your centre's experience in assessing qualifications or training.

The next section tells you what sort of evidence you will need to provide to demonstrate your organisation's understanding of the quality assurance criteria and plans to ensure that you will fully comply with these criteria. It follows the same format as the Systems Approval Application Form and gives you advice on the information we are looking for to allow us to fully consider your application.

In the next section, we ask you to attach relevant documents with your application. These need to be reviewed by the Systems Approver before the approval visit.

The numbering below refers to SQA's Quality Assurance Criteria. An explanation is given on the rationale for each criterion and what is expected within it.

There are some specific requirements within the criteria which apply only to regulated qualifications. Regulated qualifications are SVQs and other qualifications which assess knowledge, understanding and occupational competence in the workplace. Higher National and National Qualifications are not regulated.

At the approval stage, you are only expected to be able to explain what your approach will be to meeting the criteria. You cannot be considered to be fully meeting the criteria until you have implemented the relevant policies and procedures. Evidence of implementation will be considered through systems verification after approval.

The *Guide to Systems Verification for Centres 2015–18*, on the quality assurance section of SQA's website, provides full details of what will be looked at during systems verification visits.

1 Management of a centre

Systems Approval Application Form reference

A8: Management of a centre: The first quality assurance category for systems approval relates to the management of the centre. We need to ensure that quality assurance is managed effectively and that processes which support SQA qualifications are documented, implemented, reviewed and continuously improved.

Criterion 1.1: Policies and procedures must be documented and reviewed to ensure full compliance with SQA quality criteria.

Rationale for this criterion

This ensures that there is a system for the management of quality systems in the centre. The system must be documented so it can be audited and evaluated against SQA requirements, both by the centre and by SQA's Systems Verifiers.

Centres' quality documentation (eg policies, procedures, recording documentation) should be regularly reviewed to ensure that it reflects current practice, is up-to-date, and is fit for purpose.

Specific requirements

- ◆ The quality system must be documented
- ◆ Outcomes of reviews must be recorded and actioned
- ◆ There must be a system of version control for documentation

Further information

Documents may be held electronically or in hard copy but should include policies, procedures and supporting documentation for the assessment of SQA qualifications. The centre documentation should be made available to all staff and candidates involved in the SQA programmes. All staff should be fully aware of the policies and procedures operating within the centre.

Centres must have a documented schedule for reviewing their quality management system on an ongoing basis, and demonstrate how they will record and action reviews and ensure that all staff are made aware of changes.

Version control could be evidenced by version numbers and dates of the last review recorded on documentation (eg as a footer on every page).

For certain documents, where there are legal or regulatory reasons for having a clear audit trail of changes — for example, key policy documents — it may also be appropriate to use a version control table to keep track of what changes were made, when and by whom.

It should also be clear in documented roles and responsibilities who is responsible for reviewing, updating, controlling and disseminating documents relating to quality assurance of SQA qualifications.

Evidence required in advance of the approval visit

- ◆ Contents list of your organisation's quality manual (refer to other criteria for the policies and procedures that must be included)
- ◆ Planned dates for production and/or review of policies and procedures
- ◆ Version control demonstrated on policy documents (for all categories) or a statement describing the version control approach

Criterion 1.2: Policies and procedures must be endorsed by senior management and disseminated to all relevant staff.

Rationale for this criterion

The senior management of the centre should lead on or endorse all policies, devolve authority appropriately for development of procedures, and ensure that there are mechanisms in place for ensuring that staff are made aware of their responsibilities and kept up-to-date.

Evidence required in advance of the approval visit

- ◆ Senior management support for policies recorded on policy documents, or as a covering statement

Criterion 1.3: SQA must be notified of any changes that may affect the centre's ability to meet the Quality Assurance Criteria.

Rationale for this criterion

This information is required to enable SQA to minimise possible risks and to provide centres with additional support if required.

Specific requirements

A notification of change is required for:

- ◆ change of premises
- ◆ change of head of centre, owner or SQA Co-ordinator
- ◆ change of name of centre or business
- ◆ change of contact details
- ◆ outcome of internal/external investigations
- ◆ removal of centre and/or qualification approval by another awarding body
- ◆ lack of appropriate assessors or internal verifiers

You should demonstrate awareness of the requirements and that responsibilities for this have been allocated to relevant staff.

Evidence required in advance of the approval visit

- ◆ Inclusion of this responsibility in the job roles and responsibilities for the SQA Co-ordinator

Criterion 1.4: The roles and responsibilities of those involved in the administration, management, assessment and quality assurance of SQA qualifications across all sites must be clearly documented and disseminated.

Rationale for this criterion

This is to ensure that all staff are fully aware of their own role and responsibilities as well as those of others involved with SQA provision, irrespective of their location in the centre. This includes anyone sub-contracted or working in partnership with the centre.

Specific requirements

- ◆ Centres must have documented roles and responsibilities for the SQA Co-ordinator, assessors and internal verifiers and relevant administrative staff (eg for data management)
- ◆ If applicable, centres must have documented agreements in place for sub-contracted services or partnership arrangements in relation to assessment and quality assurance of SQA qualifications

Further information

The roles and responsibilities may be shown on job descriptions, specific role descriptions relating to SQA, or in procedural documents, but must be sufficiently detailed to meet all of SQA's requirements.

The functions of the SQA Co-ordinator may be split between different members of staff, but it must be clear how all the responsibilities are covered. These are:

- ◆ to be the first point of contact between the centre, SQA and candidates
- ◆ to ensure policies and procedures are in place to support the quality assurance process
- ◆ to ensure that policies and procedures are reviewed regularly and updated in line with current SQA guidance and with centre decisions
- ◆ to ensure that the current version of all documentation is used
- ◆ to enable internal verifiers and assessors to meet on a regular basis
- ◆ to support the sharing of best practice amongst assessors and internal verifiers
- ◆ to liaise between SQA quality assurance staff and assessors/internal verifiers when SQA quality assurance staff wish to visit
- ◆ to circulate the subsequent quality assurance report to appropriate personnel
- ◆ to ensure that any required actions and development points identified in a quality assurance report are discussed and acted upon

- ◆ to ensure all data passed on by internal verifiers and assessors is processed and submitted to SQA according to the centre's data management policy
- ◆ to ensure relevant centre staff check for Scottish Candidate Number (SCN) of new candidates
- ◆ to notify SQA of any changes which may affect the centre's ability to meet the criteria

You must have a documented system for the management of sub-contracted services or partnership arrangements in relation to assessment and quality assurance of SQA qualifications. If you will be using the services of anyone who is not an employee of the centre, or will be working with another organisation to meet the quality assurance requirements, then you must provide evidence of a signed contract, partnership agreement or memorandum of understanding that clearly identifies the responsibilities of all parties.

Evidence required in advance of the approval visit

- ◆ Job roles and responsibilities for the SQA Co-ordinator, assessors, internal verifiers and member of staff responsible for data management
- ◆ Defined roles and responsibilities for anyone sub-contracted or who will be working in partnership with the centre

Criterion 1.5: Suspected candidate or staff malpractice must be investigated and acted upon, in line with SQA requirements.

Rationale for this criterion

SQA is committed to safeguarding its reputation for the quality and credibility of its qualifications. All allegations of malpractice must be investigated consistently, fairly and impartially.

Specific requirements

The policies and procedures for malpractice must cover both malpractice by candidates and malpractice by centre staff.

Procedures must include:

- ◆ reporting
- ◆ investigation
- ◆ communicating outcomes
- ◆ sanctions
- ◆ actions
- ◆ appeals
- ◆ record-keeping
- ◆ retention of records of all investigations of malpractice to be provided to SQA on request (see criteria 4.7 and 6.4)

Any suspected cases of centre malpractice must be reported to SQA. In addition, for those qualifications that are subject to statutory regulation by SQA

Accreditation or Ofqual, centres are required to report any suspected case of candidate malpractice to SQA. These requirements must be written into your procedures.

Evidence required in advance of the approval visit

- ◆ Malpractice policy and procedure

Criterion 1.6: No-one with a personal interest in the outcome of an assessment is to be involved in the assessment process. This includes assessors, IVs and invigilators.

Rationale for this criterion

Having a personal interest in the outcome of an assessment amounts to conflict of interest, which poses a risk to the integrity of assessment. Centres must take steps to militate against this risk.

Further information

At induction, assessors, internal verifiers and invigilators must be informed of the requirement on them to declare any personal interest and what the mechanism is for making such a declaration (eg informing their line manager in writing, or completing a form and submitting it to the SQA Co-ordinator). This should be included on induction checklists.

Staff should make a declaration if they are related to or have a personal relationship with a candidate, and are currently deployed to:

- ◆ set assessments which this candidate will undertake
- ◆ make assessment judgements on this candidate's evidence
- ◆ internally verify assessment decisions on this candidate's work
- ◆ invigilate an assessment which this candidate is sitting

Conflict of interest also applies where an individual stands to make a personal financial gain from the outcome of the assessment, as opposed to payment to the centre through normal business practices.

Evidence required in advance of the approval visit

- ◆ Procedure for dealing with conflict of interest for assessors, internal verifiers or invigilators

Criterion 1.7: There must be an effective process for communicating with staff, candidates and SQA.

Rationale for this criterion

This is to ensure that all staff are fully aware of SQA's current requirements. This could be information in relation to specific qualifications, or about administrative procedures, or wider policy, or qualification development issues. SQA will only

send this information directly to the SQA Co-ordinator, and so there must be an internal process for disseminating information to the relevant staff.

It is important that you can demonstrate that you have systems for communicating with SQA and candidates in order to keep everyone fully informed.

Further information

You should state, in your documentation of roles and responsibilities, who has responsibility for communicating with SQA and for distributing information from SQA to staff and candidates. This is likely to include the roles and responsibilities of the SQA Co-ordinator and/or relevant administrative staff. Managers may have responsibility for disseminating information to their staff. Individual members of staff can also keep themselves up-to-date using SQA's website and the My Alerts service.

Other staff, eg assessors or tutors, may have specific responsibility for passing on information to candidates, and receiving information from them.

You may be asked, or wish, to provide feedback on certain issues to SQA (eg comments on qualifications, feedback on examination papers) and the roles and responsibilities should cover this.

Evidence required in advance of the approval visit

- ◆ Communication procedure or description of how you will manage communication with staff and candidates

Criterion 1.8: Feedback from candidates and staff must be sought and used to inform centre improvement plans.

Rationale for this criterion

You must ensure that staff and candidates are given the opportunity to provide feedback on your systems and the SQA qualifications that candidates undertake, with a view to this being reviewed and the systems and programmes being enhanced for future participants.

You should aim to use feedback that you gather to assist with monitoring the operation of your systems, to ensure that you continue to comply with SQA criteria and to inform continuous improvement.

Further information

Feedback should be actively sought, reviewed and acted upon. You should put procedures and mechanisms in place for this.

Candidates and staff may provide feedback on a range of issues, but for SQA systems approval and verification, we are concerned with the issues under the

SQA categories of criteria. Feedback mechanisms should give opportunities and encourage candidates and staff to comment on these issues.

Evidence required in advance of the approval visit

- ◆ Procedure or description of how you will gather feedback from candidates and use this to inform improvements

Criterion 1.9: The centre must comply with requests for access to records, information, candidates, staff and premises for the purpose of external quality assurance activities.

Rationale for this criterion

In order to make an objective assessment of a centre's compliance against SQA's Quality Assurance Criteria, SQA quality assurance representatives must have access to the relevant people and documentation.

Specific requirement

Centres offering regulated qualifications must also allow access to SQA Accreditation or Ofqual staff.

Further information

The roles and responsibilities of the centre's SQA Co-ordinator should include the management of SQA external quality assurance. This may also be included in documented procedures, eg assessment and verification.

Evidence required in advance of the approval visit

- ◆ Inclusion of responsibility for this in the job roles and responsibilities of the SQA Co-ordinator.

Criterion 1.10: Outcomes of external quality assurance must be disseminated to appropriate staff and any action points addressed within agreed timescales.

Rationale for this criterion

The results of SQA external quality assurance activity must be made known to all relevant staff, to re-affirm positive aspects and good practice, and also make staff aware of any action points or recommendations. Staff must be clear about the specific roles they play in ensuring action points are addressed within agreed timescales.

Further information

You must outline how you will implement and monitor outcomes of SQA external quality assurance activity and how relevant staff will be kept informed.

If required actions are set as a result of SQA systems or qualification verification, an agreed timescale will be set for addressing these. Sanctions may be applied if centres do not fully meet the action points within this timescale.

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

Evidence required in advance of the approval visit

- ◆ Inclusion of responsibility for this in the job roles and responsibilities for the SQA Co-ordinator.

Management of a centre: additional sources of guidance

- ◆ [Induction Guide for SQA Co-ordinators](#)
- ◆ [SQA Learning and Development Units for assessor and internal verifier roles and responsibilities](#)
- ◆ [Policy and procedures for dealing with malpractice in internally assessed qualifications: Information for centres \(valid from April 2015\)](#)
- ◆ [Candidate Malpractice in Externally Assessed Examinations: Information for Centres](#)
- ◆ [The Appeals process: Information for centres](#) (published April 2015)
- ◆ [Candidate disclaimer for SVQ portfolios](#)
- ◆ [External Verification: A Guide for Centres](#)

2 Resources

Systems Approval Application Form reference

A9: Resources: Your procedures for managing resources must be documented, implemented and monitored to meet SQA requirements.

Criterion 2.1: Assessors and internal verifiers must be competent to assess and internally verify, in line with the requirements of the qualification.

Rationale for this criterion

To ensure the validity and integrity of the qualifications offered by SQA, it is important that assessors/internal verifiers have the appropriate qualifications and occupational competence in relation to the qualifications they are assessing/verifying.

Specific requirements

- ◆ Assessors and internal verifiers must have occupational experience, understanding and any necessary qualifications, as specified in the SQA requirements for the qualification. The requirements may be stated in, for example, Assessment Strategy, Unit specification, operational handbook, Arrangements document/Group Award Strategy document
- ◆ Assessors and verifiers of regulated qualifications must achieve a relevant assessor/verifier qualification within 18 months of starting to practise where no alternative timescale is stated in an Assessment Strategy
- ◆ Assessors and internal verifiers for regulated qualifications must undertake relevant continuing professional development activities, and keep records of this

Evidence required in advance of the approval visit

- ◆ Information on how requirements for qualifications and experience of assessors and internal verifiers are addressed in the recruitment and deployment processes
- ◆ Staff development/ continuous professional development policy and procedures

Criterion 2.2: Assessors and internal verifiers must be given induction training to SQA qualifications and requirements.

Rationale for this criterion

It is important that all new staff, assessors and internal verifiers have an induction programme so they are clear about roles and responsibilities and are familiar with the centre's processes, procedures and documentation for the qualification. This is not only for staff new to the organisation, but for those who have been allocated these roles for the first time.

Specific requirements

There must be records of induction (checklist as minimum).

Induction must cover:

- ◆ qualification Assessment Strategy etc
- ◆ everything the centre tells the candidate (assessment process, internal appeals etc. See criterion 3.1)
- ◆ internal verification procedures (see criterion 4.1)
- ◆ malpractice procedures (see criterion 1.5)
- ◆ conflict of interest (see criterion 1.6)
- ◆ secure storage and transport of assessment materials (see criteria 4.5 and 5.2)
- ◆ retention policy for candidate assessment evidence and records (see criteria 4.7 and 6.4)

Evidence required in advance of the approval visit

- ◆ Assessor and internal verifier induction checklist covering all SQA requirements

Criterion 2.3: There must be a documented system for initial and ongoing reviews of assessment environments; equipment; and reference, learning and assessment materials.

Rationale for this criterion

It is the centre's responsibility to ensure that it has sufficient resources to enable all candidates to achieve the competences defined in the qualifications it offers. You must, therefore, put in place a process to review your resources regularly to ensure they remain relevant, current and available in quantities appropriate to the qualification requirements and candidate numbers.

Evidence required in advance of the approval visit

- ◆ Procedure for, or description of, how you will review assessment environments; equipment; and reference, learning and assessment materials

Note: 'Environment' in this context means the place(s) or site(s) in which assessment is carried out.

Criterion 2.4 is covered under Qualification approval (Part B).

Criterion 2.5: All sites where candidates undertake assessments for SQA qualifications must be safe and appropriately resourced, and must provide access for candidates, staff and SQA personnel.

Rationale for this criterion

Some assessment sites may be owned or managed by another organisation that has its own separate processes, policies and procedures. These may be known as satellite sites.

If this is applicable to you, you must ensure that your quality assurance systems extend to all sites you will be using to assess your candidates and ensure that all satellite sites have appropriate resources and processes and that candidates have a consistent experience wherever they are located.

Further information

If you intend to use satellite assessment sites (as defined above), then you must provide a site checklist and/or a checklist of criteria that you will use to ensure the suitability of assessment sites. Access for SQA staff must be included in this.

A template for the site checklist is available on SQA's website. You can use this or your own version. You may also provide a signed agreement with the organisation that owns the site.

Evidence required in advance of the approval visit

- ◆ Procedure for checking the suitability of assessment sites not owned by your organisation (if applicable)
- ◆ Completed site checklists (if applicable)

Resources: additional sources of guidance

- ◆ Information about working in line with the current assessor/verifier standards can be accessed from SQA Accreditation's [Statement on Assessor and Verifier Competence](#)
- ◆ Sector assessment strategies for specific awards can be found by SVQ group on SQA's website
- ◆ Information on e-assessment can be found [on SQA's website](#) and also in the [Guide to Assessment](#)
- ◆ [Template for the site checklist](#)

3 Candidate support

Systems Approval Application Form reference

A10: You must show that candidates will be supported and guided through the qualifications for which they are entered.

Criterion 3.1: Candidate induction must include information about the SQA qualification and SQA requirements.

Rationale for this criterion

It is important to ensure that centres have evidence that candidates are given adequate support from their initial entry through to final certification. Candidates should be fully informed about your responsibilities in relation to them and aware of the procedures relevant to the qualification they are undertaking.

Specific requirements

Candidate induction information must cover:

- ◆ content and structure of the qualification
- ◆ roles and responsibilities of the candidate, assessor, internal verifier and external verifier
- ◆ guidance and support
- ◆ assessment/re-assessment, including the modes and format of assessment (both internal and external assessment) and opportunities for re-assessment (including charging policy for re-assessment, if relevant)
- ◆ how feedback on assessments will be provided
- ◆ equal opportunities and assessment arrangements
- ◆ malpractice and declarations of authenticity
- ◆ complaint/grievance procedures
- ◆ internal assessment appeals
- ◆ data protection (consent to share information, open mail)

Centres must provide information relating to the SQA qualifications to candidates prior to submitting entries.

Further information

Induction materials may be provided to the candidates in hard copy or made available for them to access electronically.

Depending on the nature of the programme and mode of attendance, candidate induction may be as simple as providing these materials, or induction activities may take place over a period of time, possibly spanning a number of weeks from the start of the programme.

Candidate induction checklists should be provided to ensure that staff conducting induction cover all the required information, and candidates retain their own record of what was covered. You may require that candidates sign the induction checklist to confirm that they were provided with all the information.

Evidence required in advance of the approval visit

- ◆ Candidate induction checklist covering all SQA requirements.

Criterion 3.2 is under Qualification Approval, Part B.

Criterion 3.3: Policies and procedures must give SQA candidates equal opportunities for assessment.

Rationale for this criterion

SQA systems approval and verification focuses on equal opportunities in relation to SQA qualifications and the candidates undertaking them. Any centre offering SQA qualifications must ensure that everyone eligible to take a qualification has an equal chance of benefitting from the services that the centre provides. There must be no discriminatory barriers in the way of any individual who wishes to take SQA qualifications.

Centres should ensure that no individual is discriminated against by virtue of their protected characteristics: age; disability; gender; gender re-assignment; marriage and civil partnership; pregnancy and maternity; race and ethnicity; religion and belief; sexual orientation; or other unjustifiable factor, within the constraints of available resources and current legislation.

Specific requirement

Centres must have a documented commitment to equal access to assessment.

Further information

Barriers to assessment might include: night-shift working, physical/sensory impairment, English as a second language or learning difficulties. Barriers should be removed wherever possible, but any changes should not give an unfair advantage over other candidates, or compromise the integrity of the assessment.

Evidence required in advance of the approval visit

- ◆ Equal opportunities policy or statement, including equal access to assessment

Criterion 3.4 is under Qualification approval, Part B.

Criterion 3.5: Individual candidates' requirements for assessment arrangements must be discussed, identified, implemented and recorded.

Rationale for this criterion

Assessment arrangements allow candidates who are disabled, and/or who have been identified as having additional support needs, appropriate arrangements to access the assessment without compromising its integrity. Candidates are individuals with a diverse range of needs and it is important that centres consider the individual assessment needs of their candidates when considering the most appropriate assessment arrangements.

This applies to both internal and external assessment, although centres are only required to notify SQA of proposed arrangements for external assessments.

Specific requirements

Centres must inform all candidates at induction of the availability of assessment arrangements to address additional support needs.

Centres must have procedures for managing assessment arrangements for both internal and external (where applicable) assessments, covering:

- ◆ identification and evidence of needs
- ◆ how needs are met, across different subjects/Units
- ◆ how recommendations for assessment arrangements are independently confirmed
- ◆ recording and communication of assessment arrangements put in place
- ◆ review of needs and support over time

Evidence required in advance of the approval visit

- ◆ Statement of intent to provide support and assessment arrangements for candidates with additional needs
- ◆ Information on the process which will be used for identifying specific additional needs of candidates, identifying, implementing and reviewing appropriate assessment arrangements, and recording this

Criterion 3.6: Candidate complaints must be handled in line with a documented complaints procedure which meets SQA requirements.

Rationale for this criterion

SQA wants to ensure that candidates are provided with a complaints/grievance process on matters not directly involving assessment decisions. The procedure can be invoked at any stage of a candidate's qualification and should be used for complaints about any aspect of the programme. However, complaints about assessment decisions should be processed through the appeals procedure (see criterion 4.8).

Specific requirements

- ◆ Centres' complaints procedures must explain that all candidates have the right to complain to SQA about assessment-related matters (but not assessment judgements), once they have exhausted their centre's complaints procedure
- ◆ Candidates on regulated qualifications, also have the right to complain to SQA Accreditation or Ofqual once they have exhausted their centre's complaints procedure and the SQA Awarding Body's complaints procedure. This must be stated in centres' procedures if they deliver regulated qualifications

Further information

You must have a documented complaints/grievance procedure and must ensure that this is included as part of candidate induction. Reasonable timescales must be attached to each stage of the process. There should be at least two people with whom candidates can raise complaints with initially.

The procedures must also include mechanisms for:

- ◆ dissemination to candidates
- ◆ notifying the candidate of outcome and subsequent actions
- ◆ recording and retaining records

Details of any complaints/grievances should be logged and retained for review by SQA quality assurance staff. Complaints should also be analysed for trends, to inform quality improvement in the centre.

You must also inform candidates that SQA can deal with complaints from any candidates about assessment — in the broadest sense, including the conduct of, and environment for, assessment — but only if the candidate has already exhausted the centre's complaints procedure. Appeals against internal assessment decisions should go through Appeals Procedures (see criterion 4.8).

SQA will not deal with complaints about the wider experience of being a student (eg student support services, funding, student facilities).

For public sector centres in Scotland, any complaints about these issues that have not been resolved through the centre's complaints procedures should go directly to the Scottish Public Services Ombudman (SPSO).

Evidence required in advance of the approval visit

- ◆ Complaints policy and procedures

Candidate support: additional sources of guidance

- ◆ [Assessment Arrangements Explained](#)
- ◆ [Customer Complaints and Feedback section on SQA's website](#)

4 Internal assessment and verification

Systems Approval Application Form reference

A11: Internal Assessment and Verification: Internal assessment and verification procedures must be documented, implemented and monitored to meet qualification and SQA requirements. You are required to provide evidence of your systems, policies and procedures to ensure all assessment decisions will be consistent with qualification standards, and how you will maintain records of the internal verification process.

Criterion 4.1: Internal assessment and verification procedures must be documented and monitored to meet SQA requirements.

Rationale for this criterion

Internal verification is a crucial element of SQA's quality assurance. It ensures that all candidates entered for the same qualification are assessed fairly and consistently to the specified standard. 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.

To ensure effective assessment and internal verification centres must regularly review the effectiveness of their procedures and make any necessary improvements, and ensure that changes made by SQA are adopted.

Specific requirements

Internal verification procedures must include the three stages of pre-assessment, during assessment and post assessment.

Further information

The three stages of internal verification are:

Stage 1 (Pre-assessment)

Your procedures must cover:

- ◆ how you will check the assessment instruments for validity (currency and fitness for purpose) including SQA-devised assessments
- ◆ your process for submitting centre-devised assessments to SQA for prior verification, where appropriate
- ◆ how you will ensure that all assessors and internal verifiers have a common understanding of the standards required, even when assessments have been published by SQA

Stage 2 (During assessment)

Your procedures must cover:

- ◆ how and when candidate evidence will be internally verified
- ◆ how you will record assessment and internal verification activities
- ◆ how you will schedule and record assessor and internal verifier meetings
- ◆ how you will record standardisation activities
- ◆ how the risk of plagiarism will be minimised
- ◆ associated documentation such as: internal verifier feedback sheets; observation of assessment record forms; sampling plans or matrices to record all internal verification activity; internal verifier 'sign-off' sheets confirming candidate achievement

Sampling candidate evidence

Your procedures should state your sampling strategy.

You should consider a risk-based approach to sampling which takes account of factors such as:

- ◆ new or inexperienced assessors and internal verifiers
- ◆ new or revised qualifications
- ◆ revised assessment instruments
- ◆ previous quality assurance reports
- ◆ methods of assessment
- ◆ assessment location
- ◆ mode of delivery

Stage 3 (Post-assessment)

Your procedures should state how assessment and internal verification processes will be reviewed and updated.

Evidence required in advance of the approval visit

- ◆ Internal verification policy and procedures
- ◆ Pro forma to be used to record internal verification activities

Criteria 4.2, 4.3 and 4.4 are under Qualification approval, Part B.

Criterion 4.5: Assessment materials and candidate evidence (including examination question papers, scripts and electronically-stored evidence) must be stored and transported securely.

Rationale for this criterion

This is to ensure that the security and integrity of the assessment material is maintained. In particular, this relates to assessments where a candidate would

gain an unfair advantage by seeing the assessment in advance and the assessment is carried out under controlled conditions (for example, an HN Graded Unit examination). This includes both assessments developed within the centre and assessments produced and published by SQA.

Candidate evidence must be stored securely, to minimise the risks of malpractice and to ensure that it is available for internal and external verification.

Specific requirements

Centres must make all staff aware that any breach in the security of the assessment materials produced and published by SQA must be reported immediately to SQA.

Further information

The requirements for secure storage and transport should be included in your assessment and internal verification procedures, and this must be covered in assessor and internal verifier induction.

You must put suitable practical arrangements in place in all assessment sites for the secure storage of assessment materials and candidate evidence. Transport arrangements within and between assessment sites must also ensure the security of the materials.

For centres in the UK, if you are intending to offer HN qualifications, you will be given access to SQA's secure website for centres if you are successful in gaining approval. This is an online resource containing assessment exemplar content and other secure information used in the delivery of our suite of qualifications. To access the secure site, a centre must be approved for qualifications with materials on the secure site. A username and password are required to access the secure site, and these are issued to SQA Co-ordinators. Access to the secure site for assessors and internal verifiers is granted at the discretion of the SQA Co-ordinator. It is the responsibility of the centre to ensure that the security of assessment materials accessed from the secure site is maintained within the centre. Any breaches of security must be reported immediately to SQA.

Evidence required in advance of the approval visit

- ◆ Description of arrangements for secure storage and transport of assessment materials

Criterion 4.6 is under Qualification approval, Part B.

Criterion 4.7: Candidate evidence must be retained in line with SQA requirements.

Rationale for this criterion

SQA requires that candidate assessment evidence is retained by centres for defined periods for the purposes of internal and external verification, and in case

of any resulting queries, candidate internal assessment appeals or suspected malpractice.

Specific requirements

In most cases, centres are required to retain candidate assessment evidence for three weeks after the candidate Unit completion date the centre has notified to SQA.

However, if a centre is selected for external verification, the candidate assessment evidence for the selected Units must be retained for the qualification verification visit or central verification event. This may be physical evidence or records of the evidence (where the evidence is ephemeral).

In the case of an appeal to SQA against an internal assessment result in a regulated qualification, centres must retain records, including all materials and candidate evidence, until the appeal has been resolved. Thereafter, assessment and internal verification records for appeals cases should be retained for five years.

Where an investigation of suspected malpractice is carried out, centres must retain related records and documentation for three years. Records should include any work of the candidate and assessment or verification records relevant to the investigation. In an investigation involving a criminal prosecution or civil claim, records and documentation will be retained for five years after the case has been heard. In the case of an appeal to SQA against the outcome of a malpractice investigation, assessment records must be retained for five years.

Further information

The requirements for retention of candidate evidence must be stated in your assessment policies and procedures and covered in induction for assessors and internal verifiers.

Candidate assessment evidence may be in electronic, paper, visual or audio formats. It must be stored securely (see criterion 4.5).

There are separate requirements for retention of records of assessment outcomes/candidate achievement (see criterion 6.4).

Evidence required in advance of the approval visit

- ◆ Policy for retention of candidate assessment evidence

Criterion 4.8: Internal assessment appeals must be handled in line with a documented procedure which meets SQA requirements.

Rationale for this criterion

SQA requires that if a candidate disagrees with an internal assessment decision, he/she should have the right to appeal. They should know the grounds on which an appeal can be made, and the procedure for doing so.

Specific requirements

If you are intending to offer **regulated qualifications** your procedures must include the requirement to inform candidates that they have additional stages of appeal:

- ◆ to SQA (the awarding body), once the centre's appeals procedure has been exhausted
- ◆ to SQA Accreditation or Ofqual if they feel that the centre and/or SQA (awarding body) has not dealt with the appeal appropriately. SQA Accreditation or Ofqual cannot overturn assessment decisions or academic judgements, but may investigate the effectiveness of the centre's and/or SQA's appeals process and require corrective action.

Further information

You must have a documented internal appeals procedure and ensure that this is included as part of candidate induction. Reasonable timescales must be attached to each stage of the process.

The appeals procedure must include mechanisms for:

- ◆ dissemination to candidates
- ◆ notifying the candidate of outcome and subsequent actions
- ◆ recording and retaining records

Details of any appeals should be retained for review by SQA quality assurance staff.

There should be at least three stages in the centre's procedure, for example:

Stage 1 — the candidate's first point of contact is the assessor, then if still unresolved...

Stage 2 — internal verifier, then if still unresolved...

Stage 3 — independent third party (part of organisation, or another centre, not SQA)

The specific requirements related to regulated qualifications must be stated in your procedures if you will be delivering regulated qualifications.

Evidence required in advance of the approval visit

- ◆ Internal assessment appeals procedure

Internal assessment and verification: additional sources of guidance

- ◆ [SQA's Internal Verification: A Guide for Centres offering SQA Qualifications](#)
- ◆ [Internal verification: A Guide for Centres Offering Ofqual Regulated Qualifications](#) includes the purpose and function of internal verification
- ◆ Internal Verification Toolkit on QA page of the SQA website
- ◆ [SQA's Guide to Assessment](#)
- ◆ The [National Occupational Standards for Learning and Development](#) include standards on which assessor/verifier practice (and therefore qualifications) are based:
 - the assessment (standard 9)
 - the internal verification (standard 11)
- ◆ Sector assessment strategies for specific awards can be found by SVQ group on SQA's website
- ◆ [Full details of requirements for retention of candidate evidence](#)
- ◆ Appendix 1 of [The Appeals process: Information for centres](#) (published April 2015) provides information about regulated qualifications

5 External assessment

Systems Approval Application Form reference

A12: External Assessment: Your external assessment procedures must be documented, implemented and monitored to meet qualification and SQA requirements.

This section will only apply if you are planning to offer qualifications which have a component that is externally assessed by SQA.

Criterion 5.1: Assessment evidence must be the candidate's own work, generated under SQA's required conditions.

Rationale for this criterion

Centres must take the appropriate steps to ensure that no instances of malpractice occur and that evidence is authenticated.

Any irregularity in the conduct of an external examination can have a serious impact on all candidates taking the examination, not just those in one centre.

Specific requirements

- ◆ Conditions of assessment will be qualification-specific and must be communicated and adhered to within the centre
- ◆ Centres must ensure that appropriate resources are made available and that no candidates are disadvantaged

Further information

You must have clear allocation of responsibilities, eg of exams officers and invigilators, and be able to demonstrate understanding of SQA requirements for exam conditions, and secure storage and handling of examination papers and candidates' completed examination scripts.

Specific requirements for online testing should be understood.

You should have processes for assessing and reviewing accommodation and facilities to ensure they are appropriate for all candidates, and that the required resources are in place for scheduled external assessments (eg IT).

Evidence required in advance of the approval visit

- ◆ Procedures for managing external assessment, including roles and responsibilities

Criterion 5.2: Assessment materials and candidate evidence, (including examination question papers, scripts and electronically-stored evidence) must be securely stored and transported.

Rationale for this criterion

This is to ensure that the security and integrity of the examination material is maintained throughout the examination diet.

Specific requirements

- ◆ Question papers and any other confidential examination materials must be stored securely at the centre's registered address in a secure room solely assigned to examinations for the duration of the examination diet, and only persons authorised by the Head of Centre must be allowed access to this facility
- ◆ Centres must inform SQA immediately if the security of question papers or confidential examination materials is breached.

Further information

You must put in place suitable practical arrangements in all assessment sites to be used for external assessment for the secure storage of examination materials and candidate assessment evidence and examination scripts. Transport arrangements within and between assessment sites must also ensure the security of the materials.

You must document your procedures to address the secure storage of examination question papers and materials, from the point when the papers and/or materials are delivered to the centre, until candidate scripts are uplifted or returned to SQA. The procedures should state the roles and responsibilities of relevant staff.

SQA staff and appointees have the right of access at any time to a centre's secure storage facilities. It is your responsibility to plan and arrange for the possibility of visits by SQA staff or appointees, as visits may be made without prior notice.

Evidence required in advance of the approval visit

- ◆ Description of arrangements for secure storage and transport of external assessment materials

Criterion 5.3: The centre must submit, where appropriate, within published timelines, results services requests.

Rationale for this criterion

To ensure fairness for candidates in the external assessment process, processes are in place to ensure that candidates who have suffered genuinely exceptional circumstances, such as a bereavement or illness etc, before or around the

examination period, are not disadvantaged, and to provide a safety net check of final exam results.

Both candidates and staff in centres involved in external assessments must be aware of these services, and follow the required processes and timescales.

Specific requirements

Qualification-specific requirements for qualifications with externally-assessed elements must be communicated and adhered to within centres.

Further information

Appeals procedures for HN and vocational qualifications with externally-assessed elements are being brought into line with the Results Services for National Course external assessments, which have replaced the appeals process.

Centres and candidates undertaking external assessments have recourse to two services:

Exceptional circumstances

This service will assist candidates who could not sit an exam or who sat an exam but their performance suffered because of exceptional circumstances.

Post-results Service

This service will run after candidates have received their result. If a centre is concerned by a candidate's result, they can request a clerical check and/or a marking review of the exam paper.

You should have documented processes for managing and submitting requests to SQA.

Roles and responsibilities in relation to results services should be clearly defined.

You should check qualification-specific instructions. Some qualifications with automatic marking of e-assessments may not have these challenge processes in place.

Evidence required in advance of the approval visit

- ◆ Procedures for managing external assessment, including roles and responsibilities (as for criterion 5.1, including specific reference to managing Results Services requests).

External assessment: additional sources of guidance

- ◆ Group Award specification documents for qualifications with external assessments are available on SQA's website — for example, [PDA Dental Nursing](#) (see appendix 3 for details of conducting the external examination)

6 Data management

Systems Approval Application Form reference

A13: Data Management: Your procedures for supplying complete, current and accurate information to SQA for the purposes of registration, entries and certification must be documented, implemented and monitored to meet SQA requirements.

Once you are approved as an SQA centre, you will be given access to SQA Connect and instructions on how to use it. SQA Connect is the online customer portal that allows SQA-approved centres to access a range of SQA services that provide delivery and operational support for our qualifications. This includes the submission of candidate details, Unit and Group Award entries and Unit results. It also provides important information, and guidance documents.

At the approval stage, we are looking at your planned internal procedures for gathering personal information from candidates and entry and results information from assessors and ensuring that this data will be submitted in line with SQA's requirements.

It is essential that there are documented processes in place that will ensure that complete, current and accurate data is supplied to SQA. Appropriate centre staff must be aware of the centre's step-by-step procedures for data transfer between the centre and SQA, in line with SQA's data management requirements, to ensure that accurate certification takes place.

Criterion 6.1: Candidates' personal data submitted by centres to SQA must accurately reflect the current status of the candidate.

Rationale for this criterion

SQA holds personal data on candidates in order to identify and certificate candidates.

SQA may have to contact candidates directly and therefore requires home addresses to be made available. There is also a risk that candidate correspondence/certificates are sent to the wrong centre.

Specific requirements

- ◆ Candidates' home addresses must be used, other than in exceptional circumstances (eg if the candidate does not have a home address). If the centre changes the address to receive the certificates, they must reinstate the candidates' home addresses immediately upon receipt of the certificates.
- ◆ Centres must have a documented data management policy and abide by the data protection principles in relation to both the collection of data for transmission to SQA and in the dissemination of data from SQA. Candidates must be made aware of this and sign a data exchange agreement.

Further information

Personal data is supplied to SQA initially as a Registration Creation by centres. 'registration' is the term used by SQA to describe the process of recording candidate details (ie full name, date of birth, gender, address) onto SQA's system.

Your procedures should take account of the fact that registration is a one-time only process and the majority of Scottish candidates will already be registered. However, in certain circumstances it may be necessary to register a candidate. You must put a process in place to check whether candidates have a Scottish Candidate Number (SCN) before sending their details for initial registration. You may also have to update candidates' personal data eg change of address.

SQA expects centres to take care both in the collection of data for transmission to SQA and in the dissemination of data from SQA in terms of the Data Protection Act (1998).

Candidates should be aware that their personal details are being given to SQA. This is particularly important where candidates themselves are not completing paper forms. Where information is supplied from centres' computer systems candidates may not be aware that their details are being passed on.

It is important that you exercise care when releasing personal information supplied by SQA. SQA intend this information for centre's internal use only. Information a centre has obtained from SQA must not be used for marketing purposes or any other purpose which could be reasonably objected to by a candidate.

You will need to have a data exchange agreement for all candidates to sign and date.

You will have to make arrangements for the secure storage of candidates' personal information, both in hard copy and electronically.

Evidence required in advance of the approval visit

- ◆ Roles and responsibilities for the member of staff dealing with data management (see Management of a Centre, criterion 1.4)
- ◆ Candidate enrolment form (including collection of personal data and data protection statement)

Criterion 6.2: Data on candidate entries submitted by centres to SQA must accurately reflect the current status of the candidate and the qualification.

Rationale for this criterion

Centres must notify SQA of registered candidates undertaking its Units and Awards as soon as possible after enrolment on their programme of study, to ensure that:

- ◆ Results corresponding to the entries can be submitted, to ensure the accurate certification of candidates
- ◆ SQA can plan its qualification verification selection and activities effectively
- ◆ Learners undertaking SQA qualifications are entered as SQA candidates, with the associated responsibilities and entitlements

Entry information must be kept up-to-date to ensure that certification is carried out at the correct time for the candidate. Open entries will prevent the release of certificates.

Centres must also have a process in place for checking the status of the qualification, to ensure that they are able to submit entries and the candidates can be resultted and certificated. Entries cannot be accepted for qualifications which the centre is not approved to offer, or if the qualification is finished or in its lapsing period.

Specific requirements

- ◆ Centres must have a process in place to ensure that their centre is approved to offer the qualification before starting delivery and making entries, and to check that the correct Unit and Group Award codes are used for entries
- ◆ All qualifications, other than those subject to an examination diet with associated key dates, are subject to the requirement to submit candidate entries as soon as possible after their enrolment on the programme
- ◆ For SVQs, centres must check that the award is not in its lapsing period before starting delivery. Entries for SVQs cannot be entered in the lapsing period and the candidates must be able to complete the award before the SQA's end date for the award (see guidance below on lapsing periods and end dates)
- ◆ Centres must not send entries and results for the same candidate at the same times
- ◆ SVQ Awards and Units, Workplace Core Skills Units and Assessor and Verifier Units cannot be certificated within 10 weeks of the entry date of the qualification ('10-week rule')
- ◆ For qualifications which are subject to qualifications verification by Group Award, rather than by verification groups for Units, eg SVQs and Skills for Work Courses, the Group Award entry must be submitted at the start
- ◆ Centres must update candidate data at their recorded completion date, by submitting results, withdrawing the candidate (from Units and Group Awards, where appropriate) or extending the completion date where a candidate has been granted an extension

Further information

Entry data is supplied to SQA initially as an Entries Creation. As candidates progress through qualifications, data is submitted to SQA as an Entries Update.

Completion dates for an HN course can be up to four years from the date of entry. There is currently no enforceable lapse period for HN qualifications.

Completion dates for Units can be up to two years from the date of entry but cannot go beyond SQA's finish date of the qualification.

Completion dates for an SVQ can be up to five years from the date of entry but cannot go beyond SQA's finish date of the qualification.

Regulated qualifications (including all SVQs) are accredited for a finite period. This is known as the accreditation period. The accreditation period has a start date, a lapsing date and an end (or finish) date. The qualification is live between the start date and the lapsing date. Candidates can only be entered on the qualification until the lapsing date. The lapsing period is the period between the lapsing date and the end (or finish) date. Certificates cannot be issued after the end date. This means that any candidates who are entered on the qualification must be entered before the lapsing date and must have successfully completed it by the end date. Some qualifications have pre-set lapsing periods, eg two years for an SVQ 2.

Your centre, based on your qualification type and client base, must make decisions on when and how often data cleansing and updating should take place (ie extending completion dates where a candidate has an agreed extension, or withdrawing entries when the candidate is no longer active). Procedures for data cleansing should be included in their documented system of data management.

Evidence required in advance of the approval visit

- ◆ Process for collecting information on candidate entries for Units and Group Awards and candidate results from assessors/IVs
- ◆ Policy or statement of intent on submitting entries and results within appropriate timescales and updating data

Criterion 6.3: Data on candidate results submitted by centres to SQA must accurately reflect the current status of the candidate and the qualification.

Rationale for this criterion

This is to ensure that centres submit results at the appropriate time to:

- ◆ Allow SQA the opportunity to carry out quality assurance
- ◆ Give SQA sufficient time for the smooth operation of certification processes
- ◆ Prevent any unnecessary delays to the candidate in receiving the certificate they are entitled to

Specific requirements

- ◆ Centres must ensure that candidates seeking certification for a full SVQ, SVQ Unit, a Workplace Core Skills Unit or the Assessor/ Verifier Units are entered for the award at least 10 weeks before a claim for certification is made ('10 week rule')
- ◆ For regulated qualifications, certificates cannot be issued after the SQA finish date. This means that any candidates who are entered on the qualification

must have successfully completed it and been resulted by the finish date (see criterion 6.2 above for the explanation of the finish date).

Your procedures should include details of how results, which have been confirmed through the centre's internal quality assurance processes, will be passed from assessors/internal verifiers to data management staff and timescales for the processing of results.

For regulated qualifications with SQA finish dates, the status of the qualification must be checked to ensure that all results are submitted to SQA before the finish date.

Evidence required in advance of the approval visit

- ◆ Policy or statement of intent on submitting entries and results within appropriate timescales and updating data (as for 6.2)

Criterion 6.4: There must be an effective and documented system for the accurate recording, storage and retention of assessment records, internal verification records and candidate records of achievement in line with SQA requirements.

Rationale for this criterion

This is to ensure that accurate records of candidate achievement are retained securely in the event of any future quality assurance enquiries and to minimise any risk of wrongful certification claims.

It also helps to maintain national standards by allowing for the review of assessment over time.

Specific requirements

Centres must retain records for one calendar year following completion of qualifications:

- ◆ a list of candidates registered with SQA for each qualification offered in the centre
- ◆ details of candidate assessment, including the name of the assessor, location, date and outcome
- ◆ internal verification activity
- ◆ certificates claimed

These records must be made available to the external verifier and SQA on request. Records must be stored securely and in a retrievable format.

In the case of an appeal to SQA against an internal assessment result in a regulated qualification, the centre must retain records, including all materials and evidence, until the appeal has been resolved. Thereafter, **assessment and**

internal verification records for appeals cases should be retained for five years.

Where an investigation of suspected malpractice is carried out, the centre must retain related records and documentation for three years. In an investigation involving a criminal prosecution or civil claim, records and documentation will be retained for five years after the case and has been heard. In the case of an appeal to SQA against the outcome of a malpractice investigation, assessment records must be retained for five years.

Further information

You must provide details of your system for the accurate recording and storage of candidate records.

You should address this requirement within their documented data management procedures.

Evidence required in advance of the approval visit

- ◆ Policy for retention of assessment and internal verification records
- ◆ Description of arrangements for secure storage of records

Data management: additional sources of guidance

- ◆ [Guide to Data Exchange](#)
- ◆ [Induction Guide for SQA Co-ordinators](#)

Part B: Qualification approval

1 Qualification(s) you wish to offer

Qualification approval relates to three specific categories of criteria: resources, candidate support, and internal assessment and verification.

If you wish to find out which qualifications SQA offers, you can search on SQA's home page by qualification block type, eg HN, SVQ, or by titles or words that appear in titles. Your Business Development/International team contact can also advise you about which qualifications are available.

If you intend to offer Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQs), you first of all need to obtain a copy of the most up-to-date and relevant sector skills council (SSC) Assessment Strategy. Please speak to your Business Development/International contact for advice.

If you are offering other SQA qualifications, you should establish if there are documents that accompany the Unit specifications, such as Course specifications or Group Award specifications, as these may contain details that affect your choice of qualification(s) and the type of resources you need to provide.

Qualification Approval Application Form reference

B1: Centre details: Please provide the name and address of your centre, to ensure that this is linked to your Systems Approval Application Form.

B2: Contact names: Please provide the name and contact details of your SQA Co-ordinator, and of the person who completed the qualification approval application form (if different from the SQA Co-ordinator).

B3: Type of qualification/Units: You do not need to submit separate application forms for qualifications in the same subject or occupational areas. This is explained on the application form.

B4: Details of the qualification and Units: Indicate the qualifications you are seeking approval to offer (and confirm the first six Units to be delivered for Higher National awards).

B5: Details of the Additional Qualification Form: Please complete and attach this form if your application is for more than one qualification.

2 Resources

Criterion 2.1: Assessors and internal verifiers must be competent to assess and internally verify, in line with the requirements of the qualification.

Criterion 2.4: There must be evidence of initial and ongoing reviews of assessment environments; equipment; and reference, learning and assessment materials.

Criteria 2.2 and 2.3 are covered under Systems Approval, Part A.

Qualification Approval Application Form reference

B6.1 Staff Details: You need to complete the form: 'Supporting Document: Staff Qualifications and Experience' for each staff member listed so that we can confirm that you have appropriately qualified staff. Please provide their qualifications (full titles rather than abbreviations), telling us where and when they were gained, and give a brief outline of the experience they have in relation to the qualification/Units they will be assessing and/or verifying.

B6.2 Sites: Please list the sites you intend to use. Refer to the guidance on Criterion 2.5 relating to the initial and ongoing checks on sites.

B6.3 Partnerships: If you intend to offer qualifications in partnership, then it must be clear who is responsible for which part of the delivery, assessment and internal verification process. The centre named on the approval application will enrol candidates for SQA qualifications and has the overall responsibility for ensuring the quality of delivery, assessment and internal verification even if the centre does not perform one or more of these functions.

B6.4 Assessment Environments: In relation to the qualifications you are applying to offer, you should describe the environments (locations) your candidates will be assessed in, taking account of any Assessment Strategy requirements for SVQs or any Unit specifications, operational handbook, Arrangements document/Group Award strategy document or HN and NQ Units/Awards.

B6.5 Equipment: You should provide a list of the equipment you have which enables you to offer these Units/Awards.

B6.6 Reference and Learning Materials: You should specify the learning and reference materials you will be using.

Staff details

SVQ assessors/verifiers

SVQ assessors/verifiers must have the technical experience and skills and/or qualifications as stated in their sector's Assessment Strategy. Each strategy is written by a sector skills council that has responsibility for a designated occupational area(s). Centres coming forward for approval should always refer to

the relevant Assessment Strategy for information relating to experience, skills and qualifications.

SVQ assessor/verifiers — unless otherwise stated in an Assessment Strategy, SVQ assessors/verifiers must hold or be working towards the following Assessor/Verifier qualifications within 18 months of commencing their role.

- ◆ L&D9D: Assess Workplace Competence Using Direct Methods (L&D9D)
- ◆ L&D9DI: Assess Workplace Competence Using Direct and Indirect Methods (L&D9DI)
- ◆ L&D11: Internally Monitor and Maintain the Quality of Workplace Assessment (L&D11)
- ◆ QCF Workplace Assessor/Verifier Qualifications

With appropriate, planned continuing professional development (CPD) the following qualifications are also acceptable:

- ◆ A1: Assess Candidates using a Range of Methods
- ◆ A2: Assess Candidates' Performance through Observation
- ◆ V1: Conduct Internal Quality Assurance of the Assessment Process
- ◆ TQFE/TQSE (appropriate for assessor role only for SVQs)

QCF assessors/verifiers

It is recommended that QCF assessors/verifiers either hold or are working towards a nationally-recognised assessor/verifier qualification. This is not a mandatory requirement unless specified in a Unit specification. Competence in assessment or internal verification can be demonstrated by:

- ◆ holding other qualifications that include relevant and sufficient assessment or verification components or
- ◆ providing evidence of having successfully practised as an assessor and/or verifier of awarding organisation qualifications

QCF assessor verifiers must also have the particular technical experience and skills and/or qualifications as stated in their sector's Assessment Strategy/Unit specification.

HN and NQ Units

Assessors and internal verifiers must have the required up-to-date occupational experience and/or subject understanding, and, where stipulated, relevant qualifications and CPD. Where these stipulations exist, they will be contained in one of the following: Assessment Strategy, Unit specification, operational handbook, Arrangements document/Group Award strategy document.

HN and NQ assessors and internal verifiers also need to be competent in assessment (or internal verification) of the type involved in the qualification. This

could mean providing experience of current assessment/verification practice in line with the qualification requirements.

In addition, a relevant qualification in assessment/verification would be best practice but not essential unless a specific requirement of the Assessment Strategy, Unit specification, operational handbook, Arrangements/Group Award strategy document.

The following assessor and internal verifier qualifications (this is not an exhaustive list) are acceptable for assessing and internally verifying HN Units:

- ◆ TQFE/TQSE
- ◆ Conduct the Assessment Process
- ◆ Carry Out the Assessment Process
- ◆ Conduct the Internal Verification Process
- ◆ Internally Verify the Assessment Process

Any of the qualifications listed under Scottish Vocational Qualifications are also acceptable (although the L&D/Workplace QCF Assessor/Verifier Units cannot be achieved by assessing/verifying HN/NQ Units).

Other qualifications are also acceptable as long as they include relevant and sufficient assessment or verification components.

Customised qualifications

The document [Recognising assessor and verifier skills and knowledge: a guide for centres offering customised awards](#) has details of the qualifications and experience that are required for centres to deliver Customised Awards and includes recent assessor/verifier eligibility/CPD guidance developed by the Customised Awards team.

Sites

A site is the location where assessment takes place. Before offering a qualification, and periodically thereafter, you should review resources across all your sites to ensure they are appropriate and up to date.

You may wish to use a site checklist when you review your resources, regardless of whether you own the site or not, but a site checklist is not required for sites that you own. If you don't use a site checklist, you must have a policy and procedure covering which resources will be reviewed and how this will be done. This is covered under Systems approval, criterion 2.5.

Assessment environment (site)

The sites used by your centre should provide an assessment environment(s) that help candidates to achieve their qualification(s) in full without restrictions. The environment must also ensure their health and safety and provide for any technical/specialist needs.

It is important that you are familiar with the content of the Units and Assessment Strategy/Arrangements/Course tutor guide documents so that you can form a judgement concerning the suitability of your centre's assessment environment(s).

Equipment

SQA must be satisfied that you have sufficient equipment to allow every candidate to meet the requirements of the qualification at the assessment sites being used. You should check this before applying for approval to offer qualifications.

If you intend to use shared resources such as specialised reference materials or equipment, you must provide a partnership arrangement document. Refer to Section B6.3 of the Qualification Approval Application Form.

This completed and signed document must show that agreement has been obtained from the owners of the resources.

Learning materials

Learning materials can be provided in a variety of different forms to suit the subject(s) being learned. Examples might include web-based or hard copy materials such as:

- ◆ induction hand-outs/handbooks
- ◆ course exercises, research briefs, case studies, projects, assignments, lesson plans that identify learning materials
- ◆ media clips, blogs, video, website sources
- ◆ technical publications

Reference materials

Reference materials help candidates maintain up-to-date skills and/or knowledge in their chosen subject areas and can include:

- ◆ trade/professional websites, journals or textbooks
- ◆ media clips, blogs, video, website sources
- ◆ technical publications

In the case of vocational qualifications, reference materials can also relate to:

- ◆ employee handbooks, work instructions, procedures and manuals and codes of practice held in the candidate's workplace

Resources: additional sources of evidence

- ◆ Sector assessment strategies can be found by searching under VQ Group type on SQA's website
- ◆ [Assessor and internal verifier qualifications: a quick reference guide](#)
- ◆ Health and safety in relation to accommodation and equipment is an ongoing responsibility for all those operating in the assessment environment. In line with the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974, candidates/staff should be clear about the procedures for identifying and reporting
- ◆ [Recognising assessor and verifier skills and knowledge: a guide for centres offering customised awards](#)

3 Candidate support

Criterion 3.2: Candidates' development needs and prior achievements (where appropriate) must be matched against the requirements of the award.

Criterion 3.3: Candidates must have scheduled contact with their assessor in order to review their progress and to revise their assessment plans accordingly.

Criteria 3.1, 3.4, 3.5 and 3.6 are covered under Systems Approval, Part A.

Qualification Approval Application Form reference

B7.1 You should provide information on how you will to identify the prior achievements and development needs of candidates before or at the start of their Units/qualification and take a targeted approach is taken in helping candidates achieve their qualifications.

B7.2 You should provide information on how you will ensure that assessors maintain regular contact with candidates throughout the life of their qualification so that progression can be monitored and timely information and support provided.

Candidate development needs

Prior achievements will include previously gained experience, knowledge, skills and/or qualifications.

The identification of prior achievement at the commencement stage helps ensure that candidates satisfy any qualification entry requirements.

The matching of needs is based on the knowledge/skills candidates already have in relation to the Units they are aiming to achieve. This ensures that candidates undertake a programme that is at an appropriate level, with relevant content.

The result of the matching process could range from 'no/very little development required' to 'significant development' required. 'No/very little development' can be appropriate for eg SVQ candidates who have enough experience to go straight to assessment for the majority of Units they are enrolled for.

In the case of taught programmes, such as those associated with HN and NQ Units and qualifications (this can also apply to some VQ programmes) the general development needs of candidates are usually matched against the award requirements at the programme/course design stage, and then factored into the learning, teaching and assessment plans.

You should document what your processes will be for the identification and addressing of needs.

Contact with assessors

Maintaining contact is a key assessor responsibility, the purpose being to review candidate progress, provide necessary advice/support, and consequently revise assessment plans. This process could be in relation to Outcomes/Units/evidence in relation to the overall qualification.

Contact should ensure candidates are clear in terms of their progress and in relation to where they are within the assessment process and what will be happening next.

You should document the processes you will have in place for ensuring that candidates have regular contact with their assessors.

4 Internal assessment and verification

Assessment materials (including methods/instruments of assessment)

Criterion 4.2: Internal assessment and verification procedures must be implemented to ensure standardisation of assessment.

Criterion 4.3: Assessment instruments and methods and their selection and use must be valid, reliable, practicable, equitable and fair.

Criterion 4.4: Assessment evidence must be the candidate's own work, generated under SQA's required conditions.

Criterion 4.6: Evidence of candidates' work must be accurately and consistently judged by assessors against SQA's requirements.

Criterion 4.7: Candidate evidence must be retained in line with SQA requirements.

Criterion 4.9: Feedback from Qualification Verifiers must be disseminated to staff and used to inform assessment practice.

Criteria 4.1, 4.5 and 4.8 are covered under Systems approval, Part A.

Qualification Approval Application Form reference

B8.1 Assessment Materials: For Scottish Vocational Qualifications, please describe how you will approach assessment for the SVQ Units you intend to offer. You could provide example assessment plan(s), observation checklists, solutions to questions etc which can be centre-devised or SQA-devised, where available.

B8.1 Assessment Materials: For HN Units, please provide the assessment materials you will be using for a minimum of six Units, or for all Units if fewer than six in total are being approved, even if you are using SQA-devised assessments. (These should be made available for the Qualification Approver.) The assessment materials must comprise the instruments/methods of assessment (eg projects, assignments, case studies) and marking schemes for these Units. The assessment materials can be centre-devised or SQA-devised, where available.

Standardisation arrangements: Please describe your centre's arrangements for achieving standardisation to help ensure consistent, reliable and fair assessment decisions are made.

B8.1 Internal verification of materials: We ask you to state who developed your assessment materials and to confirm that these have been subject to internal verification using your centre's arrangements for achieving standardisation, to help ensure consistent, reliable and fair assessment decisions are made.

Assessment materials

Assessment materials are required to measure candidate knowledge and skills and come in the form of case studies, assignments, questions and answers, and observation checklists. Please refer to SQA's [Guide to Assessment](#) for further details in relation to the qualifications you wish to offer.

As well as centre-devised assessment materials, materials can also be purchased from a third party, for example an off-the-shelf electronic portfolio system with built-in question banks for SVQs.

SQA exemplar assessment instruments are also available for many HN Units. You can choose to use these if you wish but they must still be subject to internal verification. We recommend referring to SQA's [Guide to Assessment](#) if centre-devised materials are being developed. This publication covers instruments/methods of assessment and the benefits of adopting a holistic/integrated approach when planning assessments.

It is important that you make sure that SQA assessment exemplars are used in a context appropriate to the delivery of the Unit and to the Group Award of which it forms a part. Although the content of an exemplar has been prior-verified by SQA as a suitable instrument of assessment, you should note that using an SQA assessment exemplar does not automatically guarantee successful qualification verification/approval. It is still your responsibility to make sure that all the appropriate internal quality assurance procedures are satisfactorily completed at the approval stage.

Standardisation arrangements

Standardisation activities/meetings can help support assessors at all stages of the assessment process and support the principles of reliability, consistency and fairness in assessment. At the outset, agreeing instruments of assessment/assessment materials helps ensure validity in assessment — and that all staff are working with the same materials.

During assessment, periodic standardisation activities/meetings can support assessors and verifiers in making accurate and consistent judgements by tuning each assessor/verifier into the others understanding of the Unit requirements, helping identify any 'grey areas'.

Physical meetings remain the most common mechanism for standardisation, but there are other methods that can also be used to achieve interactive standardisation; for example, the use of discussion forums, e-mail exchange, webinars, tele/video conferencing.

Internal verification

All assessment materials, regardless of origin, whether they are SQA-devised, centre-devised or third-party-devised must be subject to internal verification to help ensure validity and reliability in assessment.

Seeking subject expert advice

For HNs, if you are currently an approved centre, and your assessment materials are centre-devised and not yet prior-verified, we advise that you request this to be done by SQA. This may be obtained at any time by forwarding your request along with the assessment materials to our Quality Assurance Logistics team who will provide feedback from a subject expert.

For all types of award, if you are not currently an approved centre, and you would like technical advice in relation to the Units/Awards you wish to offer, you should in the first instance contact your Business Development/International team contact.

Qualification Approval Application Form reference

B8.2 Authenticity of candidate evidence: Your centre must have a system in place for ensuring candidates understand the evidence they submit for assessment must purely be their own work.

This can be achieved by providing your centre's policy and procedures for ensuring authenticity of candidate evidence.

B8.2 Retention of candidate evidence: Describe the arrangements you have in place (supported with procedures where applicable) for ensuring SQA verifiers have appropriate access to candidate evidence during verification events.

Authenticity of candidate evidence

SQA's [Your Coursework web page](#) covers information widely available to centres and candidates on topics such as plagiarism and collusion and can be applied to the assessment of HNs, VQ/QCF Units and Customised Awards.

Retention of candidate evidence

Quality assurance requires centres to retain all candidate evidence for the Group Award/Units until at least three weeks after the official completion date. If they are contacted by the Qualification Verifier before three weeks after the completion date, all candidate evidence must be retained until after verification has taken place.

Internal assessment and verification: additional sources of information

- ◆ [Guide to Assessment](#)
- ◆ [Internal Verification: A Guide for Centres offering SQA Qualifications](#)
- ◆ [Internal verification: A Guide for Centres offering Ofqual Regulated Qualifications](#)
- ◆ [SQA's Retention Policy for SQA centres offering Higher National and Vocational Qualifications](#)

Qualification Approval Application Form reference

B9 E-assessment: Some SQA qualifications are externally assessed using e-assessment systems. We ask you to confirm if you require access to SOLAR or Safe Road User Online.

E-assessment materials

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

- ◆ How will you ensure that there is sufficient access to hardware for assessment purposes?
- ◆ Does the software that you use for assessment meet SQA specifications and standards (see e-assessment page on SQA's website)?
- ◆ Is there a system in place for password-protecting assessment material, authenticating candidate assessments, and ensuring that candidates do not have privileged access to other materials during assessment?
- ◆ Do you have a contingency plan to cover system failures?
- ◆ How will candidates be advised that computer-generated results are provisional until the verification process has been completed?

Qualification Approval Application Form reference

B10: Declaration: To allow us to process your Centre Approval/Qualification Approval Application Form, we ask that the head of centre or SQA Co-ordinator (whose details are indicated in this application form or which are held by SQA) confirms that the information supplied on the form is accurate.