Guide to Development and Validation for Centres with Devolved Authority

Contents

1.0   Introduction

The purpose of this document is to assist centres with devolved authority to validate a new, or revise an existing:

♦ Award (AWD)
♦ National Certificate (NC)
♦ National Progression Award (NPA)
♦ Higher National Certificate (HNC)
♦ Higher National Diploma (HND)
♦ Professional Development Award (PDA)

This document is intended to be a reference guide for college quality managers and course teams regarding documentation to be submitted to SQA in order to avoid any unnecessary costs and/or delays with the development, validation and operationalisation of the group award.

More detailed information, forms and guidance documents referred to in this publication are available from Qualification Development: Toolkit for Centres.

2.0   Development

2.1   Working together

Prior to starting any development, it is recommended that you let SQA know your intentions using the Development Opportunity Form (DO/1). The benefits of doing so include:

♦ ensuring there is no duplication or overlap with other proposed or current developments
♦ scheduling SQA officer time to support you with the development, validation and operationalisation of the group award and any associated units that do not currently exist
♦ avoiding delays with unit/group award coding on SQA's Awards Processing System (APS)

Centres with devolved authority have full responsibility for validation (including all associated costs) using their own college systems. Section 11 in this document provides details of key tasks associated with the validation of a group award which you might find useful for incorporating into your own college systems.

2.2   Unit development

When considering the content of the group award, the Qualification Design Team (QDT) should, in the first instance, determine the suitability of existing provision which will avoid a proliferation of units and will reduce development costs. Details of existing units are available in the Catalogue of National Qualifications and the Catalogue of Higher National Qualifications.

Centres can develop National and Higher National unit specifications for SQA to validate. Before starting any such development, centres should submit a rationale for it to SQA using the DO/1. Normally, only unique units from specialist centres will be considered.

2.3   Unit assessment support materials

You should consider whether assessment materials need to be developed to help accurate interpretation of the unit standards and, if so, what the most appropriate method would be, ie an assessment support pack/Solar.

3.0   Validation — an overview

3.1   The purpose of validation

Validation is the quality assurance process that SQA use to ensure that all new, revised, or amended qualifications are valid, credible, and fit for purpose. It is a process of peer-group review that focuses on the justification for, and coherence of, a proposed qualification and its technical specification. It confirms that any new qualification fully satisfies criteria defined in SQA's quality elements. The criteria are:

♦ The qualification conforms to the SQA design rules and principles and other technical requirements which are current at the time of its validation.
♦ There is a demonstrable need for the qualification which fills a gap in the qualifications framework and makes a valuable and unique contribution to SQA's portfolio of qualifications.
♦ The qualification is accessible to all learners who could potentially achieve it.
♦ The qualification requires a learner to demonstrate significant, achievable outcomes in a recognised curricular or vocational area.
♦ The qualification is coherent and its title accurately reflects its content.

3.2   Validation of unit specifications

Centres are responsible for the subject accuracy of the unit content, technical edit that confirms compliance with the document, *Writing National and Higher National Units — Guide for Writers* and an equality review against the protected characteristics (disability, race, age, religion or belief, sex, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, or sexual orientation).

It is recommended that the centre liaise with the SQA Lead Officer throughout the unit development process to avoid any potential delays at validation stage. The SQA Lead Officer will be able to provide guidance on whether the units are on track for meeting SQA's technical and validation requirements.

When unit(s) are ready for validation, the centre should submit electronic copies of the unit specification(s), technical edit and equality review. The SQA Lead Officer will review all materials and advise the centre of any necessary amendments.

3.3   Validation of graded unit specifications (HN only)

When the graded unit(s) are ready for validation, the centre should submit electronic copies of the graded unit specification(s), technical edit and equality review to the SQA Lead Officer. The SQA Lead Officer will review all material and advise the centre of any necessary amendments.

While the development process for graded and non-graded units is the same, the validation process differs because graded units are specific to a group award, and reflect the principal aims of that group award. This means that they will also clearly reflect the uniqueness of the title of the group award. For this reason, graded units should be developed once the mandatory units for the group award have been confirmed. These are validated at the same time as the group award by the validation panel instead of the SQA Lead Officer.

3.4 Validating group awards

The validation method used by SQA is determined by various factors including specialism, size and structure. As a general rule, one of the following methods will be used:

♦ Group awards which contain any new units are normally validated by a meeting of subject experts, independent of the QDT.
♦ Group awards made up entirely of existing units may be validated by SQA Officer Decision or by a meeting of subject experts, independent of the QDT.

The SQA lead officer can advise you on the most appropriate validation method for a particular development.

Where a meeting of subject experts is chosen, the centre is responsible for hosting the validation meeting and all associated costs. Important note: an SQA Officer must be included in the validation process to ensure compliance with SQA's validation criteria.

Note: HNC/Ds cannot be delivered outside Scotland, therefore centres developing HNC/D group awards must make it clear to SQA if they intend to deliver and assess an HNC/D equivalent (ie an SQA Advanced Certificate or Diploma) outside Scotland.

4.0 Inclusion of units on SQA's Awards Processing System (APS)

The SQA Lead Officer will arrange coding of any new/revised units as part of the unit validation process.

Centres with devolved authority for validating group awards should complete form DAVAL1 from the Toolkit and email it to SQA along with a copy of the signed validation report, validated group award specification and graded units (if applicable).

SQA cannot code a group award until all of the above deliverables have been received. All units within the group award are coded on APS and unit specifications are available on SQA's website.

Where all deliverables are confirmed as being in place, SQA will progress coding of group awards. However, if all deliverables are not in place, SQA will liaise with the centre contact to agree a solution and timescales.

5.0   Promotion

Once coded on APS, units and group awards are promoted through the following channels:

♦ Qualification page on SQA's website
♦ SQA's weekly Centre News
♦ Appropriate product catalogue
♦ Annual Report

6.0　The approval process

Approval to deliver the newly validated group award is a separate process.

Further information on the approval process is available at:
https://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/78680.html.

SQA's quality assurance process, including SQA's Systems and Qualification Approval Guide, can be found at: www.sqa.org.uk/qualityassurance.

If your centre has devolved authority and the newly validated group award is devolved, you should follow your own centre's internal approval process. You should then submit a completed Devolved Authority Qualification Approval Application Form to request the validated group award be added to your centre's approval list.

7.0   Informing the Students Awards Agency for Scotland (SAAS)

Once your centre is approved on APS, SQA inform SAAS.

8.0   Maintenance

The maintenance of a group award begins as soon as it has been coded on APS and centres begin to deliver it.

Through delivering the group award, centres may come across issues around the structure and content; for example, they may wish to suggest including an alternative unit to meet a specific need, amending a unit specification to clarify, simplify or correct something. External verifiers may also identify issues around the assessment of the qualification through their verification visits to centres.

It is important that issues surrounding delivery and assessment of a qualification are identified, considered and addressed. **Maintenance is about ensuring a qualification remains fit for purpose.**

Change requests to existing units/group awards should be communicated to SQA through a DAVAL2 Form available from the [Qualification Development: Toolkit for Centres](#).

9.0   Group award review

To ensure SQA continues to maintain a balanced portfolio of qualifications that is inclusive, addresses progression needs and reflects Scotland's economic, social, political and cultural needs, all existing qualifications (national and centre-devised (locally)) need to be reviewed periodically for currency and relevance. SQA will work in partnership with centres to carry out reviews.

9.1   Centre-devised (locally) qualifications

Centres with devolved authority to validate their own group awards are responsible for formally reviewing their own qualifications and any associated costs in accordance with system verification criteria (see sections 1.8 and 2.3).

Where a new or revised group award is to be developed, you should inform SQA via a DO/1.

10.0 Group award withdrawal

Group awards in SQA's portfolio will be withdrawn, be they national or centre-devised (local), where:

♦ an existing group award has been revised by another group award
♦ there has been no candidate uptake for a period of two or more consecutive years (three years for HN)
♦ uptake is too low to sustain a meaningful national standard

Note: There is no defined minimum uptake. Qualifications are reviewed on an individual basis, considering review history, including system verification reports.

All group award withdrawals are subject to approval by SQA's Business Case Group to ensure relevant processes have been followed.

11.0 Sample project plan for centre-led group award development and validation

Qualification title:	
Key tasks to be completed by the centre:	**Required date**
Submit a Development Opportunity Form to SQA to inform them of development/validation intentions by:	
Group award to be coded on APS by:	
Group award validation date:	
Group award validation method agreed with SQA Lead Officer:	
QDT meetings (dates identified and members invited) by:	
Unit writer training on SQA Academy to be completed by:	
Equality Review Training on SQA Academy to be completed by:	
Units emailed to SQA for validation by: **Note:** Include technical edit and equality review documentation in submission.	
Group award specification and supporting documentation submitted to validation panel members by:	
Submission of assessment exemplification (if applicable) to SQA for prior verification by:	
End of Project by: (DAVAL1 Form, signed validation report, validated group award specification and graded units (if applicable) emailed to SQA.)	
Key tasks to be completed by the SQA Lead Officer:	**Required date**
Review Development Opportunity Form and discuss any issues with regards to similar developments and/or unit proliferation and next steps with centre by:	
Invite the SQA Qualifications Manager, whose portfolio the group award will sit in, to participate in the validation meeting and confirm details with the centre by:	
Establish verification requirements, ie existing group/re-allocation of existing verifiers/new group to be set up on APS — recruitment required.	
Technically edit/validate units by:	
Process units through document processing by:	
Arrange coding of units on APS by:	
Arrange coding of group award on APS by:	
Produce information needed for the qualification page on SQA website by:	