

Information about the monitoring standards programme

SQA has been carrying out an annual monitoring standards programme since 1998. This exercise plays a very important role in ensuring that we continue to offer qualifications of a consistently high standard.

Each year we monitor a sample of qualifications to gauge how accurately and consistently standards are being interpreted and applied (or ‘maintained’) over time. We do this by selecting a sample of National, Higher National and Scottish Vocational Qualifications to monitor, based on the following factors:

- ◆ qualifications which have been monitored in the past — and for which we have archived evidence (which provides the ‘over time’ element)
- ◆ recommendations and suggestions from qualifications development colleagues
- ◆ recommendations arising from any previous year’s monitoring exercise

National Qualifications

The material we use is available centrally in SQA and, where possible, the results for internally-assessed components are provided along with uptake by year groups (where this is appropriate).

The material consists of:

- ◆ Course Arrangements documents which describe the syllabus content of the qualification
- ◆ SQA external examination papers which are the assessments for National Courses and marking guidelines
- ◆ three candidates’ scripts for each of these categories:
 - closest to the minimum mark for an A band 2
 - closest to the minimum mark for a B band 3
 - closest to the minimum mark for a C band 6
 - the minimum mark for a D

Monitoring teams also receive the grade boundary marks for appropriate subjects and levels and age and stage uptake statistics.

Higher National and Scottish Vocational Qualifications

Centres with candidates taking the Units in the sample are asked to submit assessment material, marking guidelines and the work of two candidates who have been awarded a pass and whose evidence, as far as possible, exemplifies the standard for the qualification. The HN Unit specifications and SVQ standards are made available to the scrutiny panels.

NQ Monitoring Teams

As a general principle, teams consist of one SQA expert, a teacher and one external expert.

In practice this usually means teams are composed of a Principal Assessor (PA), a practising teacher (who can be a Marker for SQA) and an external subject expert recruited from universities, colleges, or professional organisations. Teams are chaired by the external subject expert (mostly from a university), assisted by the PA whose expertise ensures that the report contains accurate information about the subject and the third member is a teacher.

Scrutiny Panels

For Higher National and Scottish Vocational Qualifications, panels are chaired by a Verifier (mostly the Senior Verifier) and normally consist of at least one other verifier and, where possible, an external specialist in the vocational or occupational area from further or higher education or from employment in a related sector.

The process

National Courses' teams judge whether changes in the Arrangements, question papers, and marking guidelines have made the standard more or less demanding or have left the overall level of demand unchanged. Scripts for the current or latest most appropriate year are compared with archived candidate evidence which had been awarded the same grade, in order to gauge whether they could be considered to demonstrate the same level of achievement.

HN Scrutiny panels judge how effectively centres are interpreting, applying and maintaining the qualifications standards. The panels are asked to focus on the level of demand of assessment instruments and the accuracy and consistency of assessment decisions made by centres. They are also asked to record in their professional opinion, whether assessment standards are being maintained as rigorously or more/less rigorously than the comparator year where archived evidence was available for scrutiny. SVQs have been included in the monitoring standards program in previous years'

Dissemination

Overall results of each year's monitoring activity are being disseminated via a Digest and posted on the Research Information Services section of SQA's website (www.sqa.org.uk). Detailed subject specific reports are posted on the Research and Information Services section of the website and appear under the Monitoring Standards heading. They are also available on the NQ and HN pages of the website.