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National Qualifications Awards

Qualification Verification Summary Report 2022–23

Scottish Studies

Verification group number: 613

National Qualifications Awards

H3YP 44 Scottish Studies: Scotland in Focus (SCQF level 4)
H3YP 45 Scottish Studies: Scotland in Focus (SCQF level 5)
H3YP 46 Scottish Studies: Scotland in Focus (SCQF level 6)

General comments

In session 2022–23, verification for the Scotland in Focus unit was completed between February and May of 2023.

Verification samples across centres included candidate evidence from levels 4, 5 and 6. No examples of level 3 were presented this year. However, this session saw an increase in level 6 qualifications presented in comparison with previous years.

This session, verification for Scottish Studies (Scotland in Focus) was done through visiting centres, and this has been helpful to, once again, have face-to-face dialogue with centre staff. These interactions were positive and allowed assessment decisions to be confirmed and centres to ask questions. Centre staff used verification meetings to seek advice on levels, content and delivery of their courses as well as on presentation and national standards.

Verifiers found that, in the main, candidates were presented at an appropriate level, though there were some instances where candidates should have been assessed at a lower level.

The majority of centres demonstrated a sound understanding of the national standards for the unit.

In the samples verified, some candidates were judged to have achieved a level which had not yet been achieved, due to a lack of sufficient detail for the level of presentation. These centres were advised to ensure that completed work reflected candidate aims in sufficient detail for the level of presentation. Levels of presentation can be characterised as follows:

- level 3: 'basic'
- level 4: 'in some detail'
- level 5: 'in detail'
- level 6: 'in depth' and 'in detail'

Some centres were advised to ensure candidates had clearly focused aims which allowed them to demonstrate their broadening knowledge of Scotland. Some centres provided candidate evidence where more than two aims were given, and this disadvantaged candidates as they were then unable to provide sufficient detail because they were attempting to cover too many aims. Centres were also reminded

that aims must be related to broadening learners' knowledge of Scotland and be clearly linked to a topic which is specifically Scottish.

Some candidates relied too heavily on source material and centres are advised to continue to ensure that candidates have not 'lifted' content from their sources without re-interpretation. Centres are advised to use dialogue with candidates to support assessment decisions in these situations to ensure that candidates have a sound knowledge of what they have learned about Scotland. For oral presentations, and when evidence is taken from a discussion, centres must ensure that transcripts, detailed teacher notes or detailed learner notes are included as evidence. It is important to evidence what the candidate has said in order to allow the verifier to determine the appropriate level of detail and relevance to the aims.

External verifiers again saw a limited range of activities being chosen to demonstrate candidate learning. Activities were predominantly written responses in a report format. There continue to be fewer occasions where outdoor learning, partnership working or creative evidence was being utilised, inevitably as a result of changes and restrictions necessary during the pandemic. It is hoped that centres will be able to return to those more activity-based and/or creative approaches. One centre did provide evidence which demonstrated creative approaches, including costume design, musical compositions and community partnerships, which was encouraging to see.

Course arrangements, unit specifications, instruments of assessment and exemplification materials

In general, centres were using appropriate SQA documentation to support candidates to reach the national standard. This was evidenced through centres' use of the candidate and assessor checklists in the unit assessment support packs (UASPs). Some centres also provided supporting documentation which included unit specification documents. However, some centres did not use these materials. Those centres were advised to use the candidate and assessor checklists and to ensure candidates are being assessed against the appropriate assessment standards, particularly when quality assuring candidate evidence for verification.

Some centres were using UASPs available on SQA secure, but others were not aware of these. Visiting verification allowed for verifiers to draw attention to these, to the exemplification of standards on the Understanding Standards section of SQA secure and to the Starter Packs on the SQA website. Centres are also reminded that SQA offers a prior verification service for centres that devise their own assessment materials and qualification visits can be arranged to support delivery of the qualification. More information on the prior verification service can be found at National Qualifications - prior verification - SQA.

Evidence requirements

Evidence requirements were understood by most centres. Centres using candidate and assessor checklists were able to effectively document assessment decisions and ensure all assessment standards were being met. Comments on assessor checklists were particularly helpful to verifiers. While these are not mandatory, they significantly add to our understanding of the centre's process for assessing candidate evidence.

When candidate evidence is orally presented, centres must provide notes of what was said, evidencing the appropriate level of detail for the level of presentation. These can be transcriptions, candidate notes or assessor notes.

Centres are reminded that assessment standard 1.1 requires evidence of the candidate's aims. This means one aim for levels 3 and 4 and two for levels 5 and 6. Candidates should not be asked to set more than two aims. It can be helpful to get candidates to frame their aims like a learning intention or thesis statement. Aims must clearly relate to what candidates intend to learn about something specifically Scottish.

Assessment standard 1.2 is related to the activity chosen to achieve the candidates' aim(s). At level 3, candidates agree on an activity, in discussion with the assessor. At level 4, candidates choose an activity and at levels 5 and 6, candidates independently identify their activity. Centres should ensure that a degree of choice is given to candidates to allow them to achieve this assessment standard.

For assessment standard 1.3, candidates are required to give information about the sources and the resources they plan to use to complete their activity. At level 3, candidates are asked to agree to the specific information and resources they will use. At level 4, candidates choose these from a selection given by the centre and, at levels 5 and 6, candidates are expected to identify these for themselves. To clarify, sources include texts, videos, interviews, newspapers, etc, and could be referenced like a bibliography; resources include equipment needed, such as stationery, ICT equipment, etc.

Centres are also reminded that, for assessment standard 2.1, candidates at level 5 and level 6 are required to analyse what they have learned, and that this analysis must be 'in depth' for level 6.

Administration of assessments

Some centres provided examples of the instrument of assessment and others used the UASPs from the SQA secure site, including candidate briefs to set up the activity.

Some centres, however, did not provide examples of the assessments used and these should be provided in future. There are multiple examples available on SQA

secure for centres to use and centres are also able to devise their own. Using the prior verification service is recommended when devising assessments.

Centres are reminded about the level of support which is permissible at each level. At level 3, candidates can be given directive support and explicit instructions. Candidates at level 4 can be given choice and advice. At level 5, candidates should work with minimal support, although teachers and lecturers can respond to direct questions asked by learners who need support. At level 6, candidates should take responsibility for their own learning and work under non-directive supervision, with teachers and lecturers providing feedback during the planning stage. For further information, centres should look at the starter packs on the SQA website, in the Award and unit support notes section.

Learning and teaching

Some centres began with a very broad overview of Scottish topics which also allowed opportunities for learners to widen their knowledge and then choose an aim from a wider range of topics.

There was evidence of integrated learning and teaching across subject areas, allowing for evidence of a deepening understanding of an aspect of Scotland.

Some centres also delivered lessons on how to analyse their evidence, which was a very useful part of the course.

Several centres used logbooks as an approach to learning and teaching and this was a highly effective way of ensuring candidates met all of the required assessment standards. It also allowed for supported reflection and analysis.

There was a little evidence of creative approaches and community working which are effective ways to deliver the Award. There was evidence of personalisation and choice in all centres sampled.

Overall assessment

Assessment judgements were in line with the national standard in most centres sampled.

Where candidate and assessor checklists were used, centres were more effective in their assessment judgements. These are also effective ways of providing marking instructions for the verification process.

Centres that were covering the full Scottish Studies Award had, on occasion, given feedback related to another subject, such as History or English, and assessment judgements on the Scotland in Focus unit appeared to be related to the assessment standards for those other subjects. Centres are reminded that candidates must be assessed using the assessment standards for the Scotland in Focus unit. Centres

are also reminded that assessment standards are different for each level, and candidates must be assessed using those for the appropriate level.

Verification

Evidence of internal verification was in place in some centres. Some centres were not able to provide evidence of internal verification and were advised that this should be a focus for the future. Centres are reminded that details of internal verification processes are required as part of the national verification process. Support for this is available at: www.sqa.org.uk/IVtoolkit.

In some centres, internal verifications systems were effective. Where evidence was provided, there was evidence of clear discussion of the standards and of the whole verification process. Some centres were able to evidence for internal quality assurance systems by including the comments of internal verifiers on candidate evidence, minutes of moderation meetings and the centre's internal verification policy.

Areas of good practice reported in 2022–23

- Centres that used either a candidate brief or an introductory set of lessons were able to effectively ensure candidates knew what was expected of them.

- Centres using published, or amended, candidate and assessor checklists were able to clearly evidence candidate attainment.

- Some centres provided detailed comments on assessor checklists which showed how and where candidates had (or had not) met the assessment standards. This is a helpful method of showing candidate achievement.

- There was evidence of clear and supportive written comments on some examples of candidate evidence.

- Some centres annotated candidate evidence with comments from internal moderation processes. This feedback came from internal assessors, internal and external verifiers within the IV system.

- In all centres, candidates had a wide choice for their Scotland in Focus units and had clearly made use of the personalisation and choice the course allows.

- Some centres had a clear internal quality assurance policy, and procedures in place showed a focused and organised approach to internal assessment and internal verification.

- Some centres provided records and minutes of meetings which formed the quality assurance process, showing the planning process undertaken by the centre and actions taken for each candidate.

- Some centres provided notes from internal verification processes, which allowed the external verifier to see the policy in action.

Specific areas for improvement reported in 2022–23

- Centre staff should ensure candidates clearly identify their aims in order to achieve assessment standard 1.1 (identifying aims in relation to broadening their knowledge of Scotland).

- Aims need to be clearly expressed and (for levels 5 and 6) the two aims given must be clearly distinct from each other.

- Aims should also be specifically focused on how the candidates will broaden their existing knowledge of Scotland.

- Aims should not exceed the number specified for the level the candidate is being presented for. This allows candidates to provide sufficient depth for the one or two aims required.

- In the introductory lessons, exemplification of effective, and less effective, aims may help candidates begin their assignments with more focus. Centres are advised to support learners to phrase their aims like learning intentions or thesis statements.

- Centres should also continue to encourage candidates to record both their sources and resources in detail and with accuracy to ensure that standard 1.3 (identifying sources of information and resources) is met.

- Candidates should be encouraged to ensure that specific sources are clearly identified either in a logbook or in a detailed bibliography. Evaluation of sources should also be encouraged at all levels. Full URL details should be provided for websites and generalisations such as: 'Google', 'Wikipedia' and 'the BBC' should be avoided as these are not specific enough.

- Use of a variety of types of specific sources is preferred; candidates could be encouraged to use books, TV documentaries, interviews and surveys, as well as internet sources (search engines should not be given as sources — specific websites or web pages should be referenced).

- Candidates should be encouraged to choose or identify activities that match their individual skills. While written reports are entirely acceptable, other forms of product, for example craft, artwork, music, an electronic presentation, a talk, an interview, a group debate, a short film or a drama production, are also valid and may allow candidates to demonstrate their strengths in a more effective way.

- Candidates should be advised that over-reliance on source material, without rephrasing or reinterpretation, is not acceptable. Lifting from sources does not demonstrate any understanding of the topic and therefore is not suitable evidence of candidates broadening their knowledge of their Scottish topic. Centres must clearly instruct candidates to express information in their own words and that material should not be lifted directly from a source unless this is quoted and acknowledged. Centres are advised to take a stringent approach to avoid plagiarism.

- When a candidate's chosen activity is a talk, centres are advised to ensure detailed notes are created and kept, either by the assessors or the candidate. This is a mandatory part of the assessment and, without evidence, the EV cannot assess the effectiveness of assessment judgements made by the centre. The centre must provide evidence of this assessment standard having been achieved in the form of a transcript of the conversation, detailed teacher notes which replicate the conversation, or detailed candidate evidence.

- Centres should ensure that candidates at levels 5 and 6 undertake analysis of their topic.

- At levels 4 to 6, candidates are asked to reflect upon what they have learned. Please note, implicit evaluation should be given credit: candidates will often evaluate alongside the information provided. Discussion of the impact, importance or significance of the topic anywhere in the candidate evidence is evidence of reflection.

- It is recommended that candidates complete a Candidate Evidence Checklist from the UASPs.

- Centres should consider using the assessor checklist sheets to record cross-marking and agreed assessment decisions more clearly.

- Centres should ensure all assessment decisions made are judged against the appropriate assessment standards for the Scotland in Focus unit.

- Centres must ensure there is a clear understanding among assessors about the level of detail required for each level. Centres should review the support materials on aims on SQA's website.

- At level 4, teachers and lecturers can offer advice to learners to help them chose appropriate aims, activities, sources and resources. Level 4 work is characterised by being 'in some detail'. At level 5, only minimal support is allowed, therefore teachers and lecturers can respond to direct questions from learners to help them identify aims, activities, sources and resources. At level 6, feedback is allowed but learners should be independent in their learning.

- Centres should ensure that there is internal verification of candidate evidence and evidence of these discussions should be retained (notes on candidates' work; minutes of meetings, etc) along with the instrument of assessment and marking schemes used.

- Using units within NQ courses 'with a Scottish context' is recommended; this will allow more candidates to achieve the full award. Centres should note that candidates need to be entered for these units, and a pass resulted, to allow achievement of the full award.

- Centre staff are reminded that all centres offering SQA qualifications must have an effective internal quality-assurance system in place which ensures that all candidates are assessed accurately, fairly, and consistently to national

standards. The centre could refer to the Internal Verification Toolkit at:
www.sqa.org.uk/IVtoolkit.