



Developing Unit Assessments for National Units

Note: this guidance applies to Units in National Courses, offered from session 2013–2014.

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Introduction

This document is a supplement to the *Guide to Assessment* but is specifically focused on Units in National Courses¹. It is primarily aimed at teachers and lecturers in schools and colleges who are delivering and assessing National Units and who are developing their own assessments.

The document provides guidance on developing assessments for National Units except for **National 4 Added Value Unit assessments**.

National Units have been designed to allow you to use your discretion to determine the most appropriate methods of assessment for individual candidates. You can use your professional judgement to decide whether or not evidence from candidates meets the requirements of the Outcomes and Assessment Standards in the *Unit Specifications*.

It is not mandatory to use the same approaches that SQA has used in Unit assessment support (UAS) packs or to use the same structure or headings. However, you should refer closely to the relevant *Unit Specifications* and other relevant documents to ensure that your assessments meet national standards. (Please see the 'Getting started' section for more information.)

¹ Units in National Courses may also be offered on a free-standing basis.

Background

Approaches to assessment in National Units

Across the range of National Units, assessments should be designed to support, motivate and assess competence as measured against defined Outcomes and Assessment Standards in the Unit Specification. When developing Unit assessments, a number of approaches can be taken and a wide range of techniques and assessment methods can be used. You should ensure that assessment is fit for purpose for the subject and level and supports learning and teaching.

As far as possible, Unit assessments should be designed to be open and flexible, with scope for candidate choice.

Thinking about how assessment supports learning and teaching

Assessment is the process of evaluating an individual's learning. It makes sense therefore to try, as far as possible, to find ways of assessing which reflect how candidates have been taught. For example, practical skills could be assessed through a practical activity, knowledge and understanding through questions. This will help to ensure that assessment will be fit for purpose and will allow the candidate to demonstrate that they can meet the standards. It will also help to provide personalisation and choice for candidates.

A key consideration for assessment of National Units is the extent to which 'naturally occurring' evidence may be used. That is, evidence which may come from day-to-day learning and teaching. This is perfectly acceptable but it must be clearly identified and recorded so that it can go through your internal verification system. For example, naturally occurring evidence could be recorded by annotating (for example, noting the relevant Assessment Standards next to the candidates' work) and signing candidates' work/log books and/or using checklists. In developing learning and teaching approaches it is important to consider ways in which evidence may arise 'naturally'. You may find that the *Unit Support Notes* will help with this. It is also important that candidates are aware that evidence generated through learning and teaching activities may be used as assessment evidence.

It is likely that a wide range of assessment methods will reflect the range of possible learning and teaching approaches that may be appropriate in Units of National Courses and so evidence may take a number of forms. For example, evidence may include, or be a combination of, practical, performance, oral, product, recorded or written evidence, as appropriate.

You should always discuss your proposed assessment with other teachers and lecturers, who may be teaching the same Unit or Units in the same subject or curriculum area, as well as internal verifiers in your centre or local authority. Your

assessment should be signed-off through your centre's own internal quality assurance system.

If you are developing your own Unit assessment or changing a Unit assessment support pack significantly, we strongly advise that you submit your Unit assessment to SQA for prior verification and that you do this before you use it with candidates.

Candidates should always be given relevant information on how they will be assessed and any conditions relating to the assessment. For example, this could be by means of a handout describing the assessment activity and the relevant conditions for the assessment. This could be similar to Appendix 1 in the appropriate Unit assessment support pack but does not need to take the same form.

Equality and inclusion

You must design your assessment to be as inclusive and as accessible as possible. This will give your candidates the best opportunity to show what they know, understand and can do. Think about the range of candidates who will undertake the assessment.

Alternative approaches to Unit assessment to take account of the specific needs of candidates can be used. However, you must be satisfied that the integrity of the assessment is maintained and that the alternative approach to assessment will, in fact, generate the necessary evidence of achievement.

For guidance on the use of assessment arrangements for disabled candidates and/or those with additional support needs, please consult the [Assessment Arrangements](#) web page on SQA's website.

Guidance on inclusive approaches to delivery and assessment for individual Units is provided in *Unit Support Notes*.

Preparing to develop your assessment

Getting started

Before you start to develop your Unit assessment, you should check whether any of the SQA Unit assessment support packs or centre-devised prior-verified Unit assessments (published on SQA's secure site) meets your requirements, or could do so with minor adaptations. For example, you may decide to use the approach outlined in a Unit assessment support pack but to change the context to tie in with your learning and teaching approaches — this would not be a significant change.

If you are going to proceed to develop your own Unit assessment, you should start by reading all of the relevant documents:

- ◆ the *Unit Specification* for each Unit in the Course
- ◆ the *Course Specification* and, where applicable, the *Course Assessment Specification* (if the Unit is being assessed as part of a Course)
- ◆ the *Course and Unit Support Notes*

(*Course Assessment Specifications* contain further mandatory information on Course coverage which may be helpful. For Units in National 4 Courses, the further mandatory information is given in the Added Value *Unit Specifications*.)

You should keep the above documents to hand in case you want to refer to them as you go along. You should check that you are using the most up-to-date versions of documents, which will be the versions available on the [subject pages](#) of SQA's website.

Unit assessment should be designed to meet the requirements of the Outcomes and Assessment Standards being assessed. You will need to fully understand these as well as the Evidence Requirements. Whether you are planning to submit your assessment for your own internal verification process, or for prior verification, or you are asked to submit evidence for external verification, you need to think carefully about how you will demonstrate that the Outcomes and Assessment Standards may be met or have been met.

Unit assessments should also be valid, reliable and practicable. Each of these principles is explained briefly below.

Validity

Validity is a measure of the accuracy of an assessment. This means that the assessment is appropriate for its purpose, has been designed to allow candidates to show that they have the required knowledge, understanding and skills to meet the standards of the qualification and that any interpretation and use of the assessment results are supported and can be justified.

Reliability

Reliability is the extent to which assessment results are consistent from one candidate to the next, from one assessor to the next, and from one occasion to the next.

Practicability

Practicability is the viability or feasibility of an assessment. For example, a valid and reliable assessment may not be practicable due to the resources or time required to carry it out efficiently and effectively.

Deciding how you will assess

In the National Units, evidence can take a number of different forms and may include one form of evidence or a combination of practical, performance, oral, product, recorded or written evidence, as appropriate to the assessment activity and the needs of the individual candidate. There is no requirement that all candidates provide the same evidence.

You should exercise your professional expertise and judgement to choose the assessment method(s) and the different ways in which candidates could generate the evidence needed to meet the requirements of the Outcomes and Assessment Standards as appropriate for your specific resources.

An approach to this might be to:

- ◆ think about the kinds of evidence that would meet the requirements of the Outcomes and Assessment Standards
- ◆ determine an appropriate assessment method or methods
- ◆ design the assessment task/approach
- ◆ identify the different ways in which the evidence can be presented

While you must have evidence to show that the candidate has met all of the Outcomes and Assessment Standards of a Unit, this does not mean that you must assess every Assessment Standard separately. A key consideration is the extent to which you, as an assessor, can 'stand back' and make an overall judgement. This will, of course, depend on the nature of the evidence.

As far as possible, a single assessment should cover the Unit. Sometimes a single assessment may cover more than one Unit.

Conditions of assessment

If no conditions are specified in the *Unit Specification*, you should ensure that, where appropriate, conditions are set for your assessment and applied consistently to all candidates. SQA Unit assessment support packs and the prior verification process provide useful guidance.

Examples of conditions include:

- ◆ whether or not candidates may have access to materials such as reference books during the assessment (sometimes referred to as open-/closed-book) — for example, if the assessment is a test of knowledge and understanding, you may wish to specify that it will be carried out under closed-book conditions; however, if it is based on candidate research or investigation, for example, you may wish to specify that it is open book
- ◆ any other resources which candidates may have access to during the assessment
- ◆ the amount of time for the assessment task
- ◆ the approximate number of words, if appropriate (eg for essays or assignments)
- ◆ the amount of support that candidates may expect from their assessors
- ◆ whether the assessment, or any parts of it, should be carried out under supervision

Time and volume of evidence

As a guide, we would normally expect the assessment time for a Unit to be approximately one hour. This should be reflected in the amount or volume of evidence expected. However, for Units in National Courses, where there are practical or process-based activities, there is sometimes a need to allow more time. Where it is not possible to distinguish between preparation for assessment (preparation of materials, setting up of equipment, gathering of information, etc) and actual assessment, then four hours is a notional guide to the time needed for preparation and assessment: assessment activity should be designed with that notional time limit in mind. The four hours may include a maximum of one hour for any final stage of assessment, such as a write-up or producing a final product. So, for example, if the evidence is in the form of responses to a short test, it could take approximately one hour. If however, the evidence is the result of an investigation over time, or of practical work or of a process-based activity, the total amount of time required for assessment may be longer.

Developing your Unit assessment

Working within your centre and/or local authority guidelines, you should now be able to develop your assessment. You do not have to follow any particular format and it is acceptable to re-use material from previous Courses and Units where appropriate, eg materials from SQA's secure website, taking account of confidentiality issues. This may include questions from SQA past papers, Coursework tasks, and NABs. However, you must make sure that your assessment satisfies the requirements of the Outcomes and Assessment Standards as described in the 'Deciding how you will assess' section above. You must be able to identify how your assessment meets the Outcomes and Assessment Standards.

In summary, here are some things to think about as you are planning and developing your assessment:

- ◆ the need for the assessment to align with the appropriate SCQF level
- ◆ the skills and knowledge that are being assessed
- ◆ the activities that will allow all candidates to demonstrate the required skills and knowledge (**validity**)
- ◆ the nature and amount of evidence which the candidate will be required to produce — remember that this may cover a full Outcome or all of the Outcomes in a Unit
- ◆ opportunities for evidence to be generated naturally through learning and teaching activities
- ◆ the amount of time required for assessment
- ◆ the resources required for assessment (**practicability**)
- ◆ the requirement for the assessment to enable all assessors to make reliable and consistent assessment decisions (**reliability**)
- ◆ how judgements on the assessment will be recorded
- ◆ the type of marking scheme which best fits the way you are assessing

Once you have developed your assessment, you should obtain feedback on the above points through your centre's internal quality assurance system.

Judging evidence

You must include a section along with your assessment to explain how evidence is to be judged. You should give guidance on how to make judgements about candidate evidence in a way that ensures reliable decisions about it can be achieved. You should describe how the Outcomes and Assessment Standards can be met.

For example, where the assessment is based on a performance, you should relate the skills demonstrated to the Outcomes and Assessment Standards. Or, where the assessment is based on questions, guidance on marking these should be given together with an explanation of how these marks translate into attainment in the Outcomes and Assessment Standards.

Unit assessment support packs have Judging evidence tables which give examples of this. You may wish to amend a Judging evidence table or create your own to explain how evidence is to be judged.

Section 8 of the *Guide to Assessment* has further useful information on judging evidence.

Prior verification

Once you have developed your assessment and it has been approved through your centre's internal quality assurance system, **we strongly recommend that you use the prior verification service before the assessment is used with candidates.** Prior verification is an ongoing process whereby your assessment is scrutinised by an SQA appointee, normally the Principal Verifier for your subject area. There is no charge for this service. The service gives a centre confidence that their proposed assessment is fit for purpose. Our experience of prior verification clearly shows that it can prevent problems arising at a later date, when the centre's assessments are externally verified.

Centre-devised assessments which are prior verified may be published on SQA's secure website, subject to permission from the centre which developed it. Centres are encouraged to give this permission as a way of sharing their professional expertise and experience in assessment.

References

When developing your assessment you may find the following material on SQA's website helpful:

- ◆ [*Assessment in the National Courses and Units*](#)
- ◆ [*Guide to Assessment*](#)
- ◆ [*Prior Verification Service For National Qualifications*](#)
- ◆ [*SCQF level descriptors*](#)

The following material is only available on our secure website and can only be downloaded by SQA Co-ordinators or other authorised personnel:

- ◆ SQA Unit assessment support packs
- ◆ prior-verified centre-devised assessments