



Internal Verification: A Guide for Centres Offering Regulated Qualifications

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About this Guide

All centres offering SQA qualifications must have an effective internal quality assurance system which ensures that all candidates are assessed accurately, fairly and consistently to national standards. This system is known as internal verification.

This Guide is designed to provide support for everyone involved in the internal quality assurance of regulated qualifications offered by SQA. It explains the purpose of internal verification and outlines internal verification procedures. It also contains information on specific aspects of internal verification, such as selection of a sample and various methods of standardisation.

We hope that the information contained in this Guide will assist centres in the development and/or maintenance of effective internal quality assurance systems.

This Guide complements the SQA [Guide to Assessment](#) and the SQA [Guide to Approval](#).

SQA provides developmental material such as [Professional Development Workshops](#) and the [Understanding Standards](#) and [SQA Academy](#) websites.

Introduction

SQA is responsible for ensuring that national standards are maintained over time within and across centres. Internal verification is a crucial element of SQA quality assurance in ensuring 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 an essential requirement for all centres as is specified in SQA's [Systems and Qualification Approval Guide](#). Each centre's internal verification system is checked at the approval stage and throughout delivery of our qualifications.

Just as there is a wide range of SQA qualifications and centres, we recognise that there are many different ways of operating effective internal quality assurance processes. For example, the internal verification system for a small training company will be very different from that of a large secondary school, a college course team at faculty level across different campuses, or an employer operating across multiple sites.

We have no wish to impose a particular system on centres although all systems must meet our quality requirements that all candidates are assessed to national specified standards. Where the term 'internal verifier' appears in this Guide it should be taken merely as a form of shorthand for any individual or team process by which the key objectives of internal verification are met.

Purpose of internal verification

The majority of regulated qualifications are internally assessed by centres. Internal assessors are responsible for deciding how candidates have performed in relation to the national standards for the qualification. All assessments must be valid, reliable, practicable, equitable and fair — and assessors must apply the standards of assessment uniformly and consistently.

The purpose of internal verification is to ensure that these principles of SQA assessment are met, regardless of the particular system used by a centre. Internal verification uses a range of processes to ensure that:

- ◆ appropriate assessments are used for each qualification
- ◆ assessments are capable of generating sufficient evidence to allow candidates to demonstrate that they have met the national standard
- ◆ all assessors are familiar with the national standard
- ◆ assessors reach accurate and consistent decisions for the same qualification for all candidates in their centre in line with national standards

Once an internal verifier is satisfied that these requirements have been met, they will act as 'guarantors' that national standards are being met. This is commonly done by countersigning the assessor's form or using an internal verification checklist, but may be by some other appropriate means devised by the centre. The important point is that clear and accurate records of effective internal verification activity are kept and are available to the external verifier and to the regulatory bodies.

The functions of internal verification

The internal verifier or verifier team has responsibility for ensuring the validity of internal assessments and the reliability of assessor judgements. This responsibility has several key aspects:

- ◆ organising the internal verification process
- ◆ supporting assessors
- ◆ checking assessment instruments to ensure validity
- ◆ arranging standardisation exercises
- ◆ observing assessments
- ◆ sampling assessment decisions
- ◆ ensuring that internal verification decisions are consistent
- ◆ preparing for external verification
- ◆ maintaining verification records

Effective internal verification is an on-going process. This allows the sharing of good practice and helps to identify any problems at an early stage. Carrying out internal verification solely at the end of the assessment process is poor practice and can jeopardise candidates' chances of gaining qualifications as there may not be sufficient time to carry out remedial action or re-assessment.

Organising the internal verification process

Centres must have documented internal verification procedures, so that all assessors and verifiers understand the centre's quality assurance system. External Verifiers also find this very helpful.

The internal verifier should be involved in the planning and scheduling of assessments. The timing of assessment and any centre policy regarding re-assessment opportunities should also be agreed in advance of the actual assessment. The internal verifier role is critical in ensuring that assessments are appropriately conducted and that any possibility of malpractice is minimised.

No individual may act as assessor and internal verifier for the same group of candidates. The internal verifier must also ensure that all candidates have equal and fair access to assessment. This may involve making reasonable adjustments to assessment arrangements in accordance with the Disability Discrimination Act.

A range of guidance documents about candidates with additional support needs is available on the [Assessment Arrangements](#) section of SQA's website.

Supporting assessors

The internal verifier must have the appropriate qualification and/or expertise in the particular subject area and be familiar with the national standard.

The internal verifier is responsible for ensuring that the chosen assessment instrument is valid, fair and practicable. They should therefore have knowledge of different assessment methods and instruments and assessment expertise.

The internal verifier can also have a developmental role for less experienced assessors by offering advice and guidance to improve their assessment skills. This can be done by assisting them to develop assessment instruments or by observing their assessment practice and providing feedback. Support should be on-going throughout the course of the qualification, not left to the point of assessment for certification purposes.

SQA offers Assessor/Verifier and Learning and Development qualifications designed to improve the quality and rigour of assessment. They are required by anyone delivering government-funded training and learning programmes but can be taken by anyone involved with internal quality assurance. More information is available on the [Learning and Development](#) section of the SQA website.

Checking assessment instruments to ensure validity

A valid assessment is one which is appropriate for its purpose. Each assessment should be designed to allow candidates to produce the evidence to show that they have the required knowledge, understanding and skills for the qualification they are aiming for. In other words, is the assessment actually doing what it is supposed to be doing?

For example, a practical assessment should be used to assess practical skills. An assessment in which candidates were asked to write about a skill rather than demonstrate it would have low validity.

All assessment instruments must be checked to ensure validity before being taken by candidates. The internal verifier must ensure that all assessors have a common understanding of the standards required. Meetings between assessors to discuss the planned assessment will help to minimise any differences in interpretation.

Agreeing a scheme for judging the evidence also helps assessors to make consistent and accurate assessment decisions in line with national standards. This could be a checklist for observing candidate performance, a set of questions to test underlying knowledge and understanding, protocols for professional discussion, or agreeing the use of video or multimedia evidence. Procedures to consider any indirect evidence of candidate achievement, such as witness testimony should also be discussed and agreed.

SQA encourages centres to make assessment material as relevant as possible to enable candidates to demonstrate their skills/knowledge. Prior verification is currently a free service which provides feedback on proposed assessment instruments and gives a presenting centre confidence that their proposed assessment is fit for purpose and does not compromise national standards. Evidence from external verification reports clearly shows that prior verification can prevent problems arising at a later date. The service is offered free of charge, but has a turnaround time of at least six weeks to allow for the possibility of having to take some corrective action if prior verification identifies flaws in the assessment materials.

Arranging standardisation exercises

Reliability is a measure of the accuracy and consistency of assessor judgements.

Standardisation is an important part of ensuring the reliability of assessment decisions for all candidates in a centre.

Standardisation exercises identify any discrepancies between assessors in their judgement of candidate evidence and allow adjustments to be made to remedy these. As well as reducing subjectivity among assessors, it helps to improve the consistency of their judgements and allows the internal verifier to identify and disseminate good practice. There are different ways of carrying out standardisation and the internal verifier should make sure that the most appropriate method is used for the nature of the evidence. Procedures should also ensure that standardisation is carried out for centres operating across multiple sites or with partnership arrangements.

The following exercises are examples used by centres.

Standardisation exercises

1 Dual assessment

Two assessors assess the same candidates. Teaming an experienced assessor with a new assessor is not uncommon but there are benefits for any assessor, however expert, in checking their assessment judgement, particularly for new qualifications and awards. It also encourages co-operative working.

2 Cross assessment

Assessors exchange candidate evidence to check each other's interpretation of the standard. This does not mean that different assessors must follow the same assessment procedure or even use the same assessment material. Cross assessment is often presumed to apply mainly to evidence within a centre but can also be used across centres. It is frequently used by multi-site centres such as large colleges and training providers and employers.

3 Evidence review

In this process the internal verifier collates assessed candidate evidence and asks a group of assessors to discuss any discrepancies between their individual judgements. This allows professional development as well as ensuring a shared understanding.

The following two related standardisation exercises are generally, but not exclusively, used with written evidence.

4 Double marking

This is a form of cross assessment in which assessors exchange the same candidate evidence to check each other's interpretation of the standard.

5 Blind marking

There are two forms of blind marking each of which is intended to reduce any bias, however unintentional, by an assessor. Evidence is marked by two assessors, but each is unaware of the other's mark. Discrepancies between the marks can then be resolved. Alternatively, evidence can be made anonymous by the removal of candidate details.

Standardisation exercises should take place throughout the assessment process to improve the consistency of assessors' judgements. Records of standardisation exercises, including any feedback to assessors, should be kept as evidence of internal verification activity.

Observing assessments

Observing assessment activities is an effective means of sampling assessment judgements. It can provide professional development and assure the internal verifier that assessors are continuing to maintain standards. It should be a supportive activity which ensures confidence in the assessment process for assessors, candidates and internal verifiers.

Sampling assessment decisions

The internal verifier should select a sample of candidate evidence to check that each assessor is making consistent decisions in line with national standards.

Sampling must be on-going through the assessment process, not end-loaded. This allows the internal verifier to review assessment judgements before summative decisions are made. This identifies any problems at an early stage and will allow any support or training to be provided to assessors.

A range of assessment methods should be included in the sample. Different centres have different sampling regimes and sample sizes such as the square root of the number of candidates. The selection of a completely random sample has strengths but the critical aspect of the sampling rate is that it must be sufficient to ensure consistency of assessment decisions across each qualification. Over time, all assessors and assessment methods should be included in the sample. All sampling strategies should be included in a centre's written internal verification procedure.

There are key features which should be considered in selecting a sample. These include:

- ◆ first time delivery
- ◆ new assessor
- ◆ range of levels of qualifications
- ◆ range of candidate groups
- ◆ mode of delivery (full/part time, online, multiple sites, partnership arrangement)
- ◆ age and gender of candidates

- ◆ achieved/not achieved
- ◆ revised assessment instruments
- ◆ previous issues or problems with internal or external verification
- ◆ cost and resource effectiveness

The outcomes of internal verification should be given as feedback to the assessors and used to inform any changes to the assessment process. This is why it is essential that sampling takes place throughout the assessment process as it ensures fairness to all candidates. Records of all sampling activity should be maintained.

All assessment which leads to certification must be 'signed off' by the internal verifier before candidate results are sent to SQA. This may be done by countersigning the assessor's form or using an internal verification checklist or by some other appropriate means devised by the centre.

Maintaining verification records

Records of effective internal verification activity should include:

- ◆ the centre's documented internal verification policies and procedures
- ◆ reports of meetings with assessors to discuss assessment planning
- ◆ reports of meeting to agree the validity of assessment instruments
- ◆ reports of standardisation exercises
- ◆ records of observation of assessment
- ◆ records of all sampling activity

The means by which this information is held and update is at the discretion of the centre but it must be readily available for the external verifier and the awarding body.

Ensuring that internal verification decisions are consistent

It is the responsibility of the centre to ensure that all internal verifiers are competent in their role and they understand and apply the internal quality assurance system consistently. All centres should have an effective selection and induction process for internal verifiers and any training or development needs for internal verifiers should be identified. Over time, the external verifier will sample the work of all assessors and internal verifiers for a particular unit and so will highlight any issues with internal verification. The centre should ensure that these are addressed as any shortcomings in internal verification can prevent candidate certification. A process of reviewing the internal quality assurance system is good practice for all centres.

Preparing for external verification

The internal verifier has an important role in ensuring that the external verifier's selected sample of candidate evidence is available. We have a range of procedures and internal verifiers should make sure that they are aware of our requirements.

The external verifier will scrutinise candidate evidence across as wide a range as possible, and will sample the work of all assessors and internal verifiers.

Record keeping policy for regulated qualifications

Any SQA centre approved to offer regulated qualifications is required to keep records of candidate assessment for at least six years. This must include records showing:

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

Such records must be made available to the regulatory authorities on request as these are the basis on which certification is made.

The regulator does not require centres to retain candidate portfolios or samples of work for this period of time. However, candidates' work must be retained until external verification has taken place and the outcome has been accepted by SQA and the centre.

Glossary

Assessment The process of evaluating how effectively learning is occurring. For SQA qualifications, the process of generating and collecting evidence of a candidate's attainment of knowledge and skills, and judging that evidence against defined standards for formal certification. SQA assessment can be internal, or external, or a combination of both.

Assessor The person designated in a centre to be responsible for collecting evidence of candidates' competence, judging it and recording attainment.

Assessor and Verifier Units Qualifications designed to improve the quality and rigour of assessment. They are required by anyone delivering government-funded training and learning programmes

Awarding body An organisation or consortium which awards qualifications.

Candidate The individual entered for an SQA qualification.

Centre An organisation or consortium accountable to an awarding body for the assessment arrangements leading to a qualification. A centre could, for instance, be an educational institution, training provider or employer, and it may operate across more than one organisation or site.

Certificate The record of attainment in a qualification issued by an awarding body.

Checklist A means of recording the judgements made about activities performed by candidates.

Competence The ability to carry out specified activities to predetermined standards of performance.

Credibility A measure of the confidence placed in the results of any assessment.

Direct evidence A term used to describe evidence of candidate performance according to the requirements laid down on the outcome that assessors have witnessed themselves. This can be performance or product evidence but, because the assessor has seen the evidence directly, it is a very reliable form of evidence.

Evidence Materials provided by a candidate as proof of his or her competence against specified criteria.

External verification The process of ensuring that national standards are maintained consistently across all centres.

External verifier A person appointed by SQA who is responsible for the quality assurance of a centre's provision and for ensuring that standards of assessment are applied uniformly and consistently across centres.

Indirect evidence Something that someone other than the assessor has observed or said about the candidate. Corroboration is required for indirect evidence.

Instrument of assessment A means of generating evidence of a learner's knowledge and/or skills.

Internal assessment An assessment marked within the institution delivering the programme of learning, including by the person who has delivered the learning.

Internal quality assurance The process of ensuring that the provision at centre and subject level conforms to the approved procedures and that consistency is being achieved within the centre.

Internal verification The process of ensuring that standards of assessment are applied uniformly and consistently within a centre in line with national standards.

Internal verifier Person or persons appointed by the centre to ensure that assessors apply standards of assessment uniformly and consistently.

Learner Someone who is following a course of study at a school, college of further education, with a training provider, or through an employer.

Malpractice Any action or practice which threaten the integrity of qualifications.

Observation A method of assessment in which the candidate is observed carrying out tasks that reflect the performance criteria given in outcomes.

Plagiarism Learners using the assistance or work of others and passing it off as their own for assessment purposes.

Portfolio A representative collection of a candidate's work, usually assembled over the period of the learning, to demonstrate or exemplify either that a range of criteria has been met, or to showcase the best that a candidate is capable of. Also used widely in reflective learning.

Practicability A measure of the feasibility or administrative efficiency of the assessment process. A valid and reliable assessment may not be practicable due to the cost or time required to carry it out.

Process The skills, procedures and/or thought processes displayed during an assessment activity.

Product Something the candidate makes or does, as part of an assessment activity, as defined in the outcome.

Product evaluation A method of assessment that enables the quality of a product produced by the candidate, rather than the process of producing it, to be evaluated.

Quality assurance system Any system at local, regional and national level that promotes confidence in a qualification by guaranteeing the maintenance of standards.

Reliability The extent to which an assessment's results are repeatable and fair from one candidate to the next, and from one occasion to the next (for example with a different set of candidates), ie a measure of the accuracy of the score achieved, with respect to the likelihood that the score would be constant if the assessment were re-taken or the same performance were re-scored by another assessor.

Standard The criteria for success at a particular level. A predetermined national level of attainment for SQA certification.

Standardisation Process to check, adjust and ensure that assessment criteria and processes (including both the administration of the assessment itself, and its marking) are applied consistently by assessors and verifiers so that comparisons of results can be made between groups (eg over time, between different ages and sexes, etc). Standardisation can be carried out within centres (internal standardisation) as well as by awarding bodies.

Summative assessment Assessment, generally undertaken at the end of a learning activity or programme of learning, which is used to make a judgement on the candidate's overall attainment. A key purpose of summative assessment is to record, and often grade, the candidate's performance in relation to the stated learning objectives of the programme.

Validity The degree to which an assessment tests the actual abilities that it is supposed to test and the appropriateness of the interpretation and use of the results for any assessment instrument (for example a driving test where a candidate is observed driving is highly valid. A test where a candidate describes how they would drive is less valid). There are many different measures of validity.

Verification The process of ensuring that quality assurance systems are being maintained. Verification can be either internal, ie within the centre or external, ie undertaken by the awarding body.

Witness testimony Information supplied by someone other than the assessor on a candidate's competence. Weight given to witness testimony will depend on the individual's specialist and assessment knowledge. The use of witness testimony rests with the assessor.