



# **NQ Verification 2015–16 Generic Key Message Reports**

<b>Verification group name:</b>	<b>All</b>
<b>Verification event/visiting information</b>	<b>Event and visiting</b>
<b>Date published:</b>	<b>December 2016</b>

**This Report combines the generic Verification Key Messages for the academic session 2015-2016.**



# NQ Verification 2015–16

## Key Messages Round 1

01

### Section 1: Verification group information

Verification group name:	All
Verification event/visiting information	Event and visiting
Date published:	March 2016

The following key messages have been identified following Round 1 verification activity.

02

### Section 2: Comments on assessment

#### Assessment approaches

The majority of centres selected for Round 1 verification used the SQA Unit assessment support packs at all levels (National 3 to Advanced Higher). It is encouraging to see centres using a variety of the Unit by Unit and combined approaches and, particularly at National 5 to Advanced Higher, portfolio approaches also. This was the first year that Advanced Higher was verified and in most cases, centres demonstrated a good grasp of the internal assessment requirements at this level.

In most cases, centres indicated which assessment support pack they had used and included a copy of the approach and judging evidence tables in their submission. A small number of centres this year used out-dated Unit assessment support packs. When using published SQA assessment support packs, centres are reminded to use the most up to date version from the SQA secure website.

[Link to SQA Secure website](#)

This round of external verification saw an increase in the number of centres adapting or contextualising Unit assessment materials compared to last year, and in the main these adapted approaches were very effective. A good number of centres are successfully making small adaptations to the published SQA Unit assessments or using them as a basis for their own assessments to suit the needs of their candidates. This is to be commended, and in many cases this practice was effective in facilitating CfE principles such as personalisation and choice. In the majority of cases, centres had been careful to ensure that the mandatory assessment standards included in the judging evidence tables were not affected by these adaptations. This year, modifications or slight adaptations were seen most frequently at levels up to Higher.

In some cases, verifiers observed SQA Unit assessments adapted to align more with 'exam type' questions and conditions. Care must be taken to ensure this kind of approach does not adversely affect or inflate the Unit assessment standards. Candidates must be judged a pass or fail against the Unit assessment standards at the level they are being assessed for.

The approach to assessment should not place demands on candidates beyond those of the assessment standards. This was observed, in some cases, where centres had produced or adapted assessments to combine two levels such as National 4/National 5 or National 5/Higher. Conversely, centres should ensure that all the requirements of the assessment standards at the higher level can still be fully met by candidates if assessment tasks are combined across levels in this way. Centres should ensure that their approach facilitates the opportunity for candidates to gather evidence appropriate to the assessment standards for the level against which they are being assessed. Centres are encouraged to refer to the judging evidence tables in the published assessment support packs or to their subject-specific Understanding Standards material for support or as a basis for devising their own approaches.

#### [Further information on Understanding Standards for National Qualifications](#)

Centres are strongly encouraged to make use of SQA's prior verification service when considering significant changes to the Unit assessment support packs, or if devising their own assessment approaches. Any assessment submitted for prior verification should be internally verified by centre staff before the submission is made to SQA and before it is used for assessment purposes. If submitting successfully prior verified material for SQA external verification, centres are reminded to include a copy of the prior verification certificate.

#### [Further information on SQA's prior verification service](#)

## **Assessment judgements**

The majority of centres across levels National 3 to Advanced Higher have a good understanding of national standards and made accurate, reliable assessment decisions in line with these standards. This was particularly evident where centres had shown evidence of robust and effective internal verification processes.

Many centres made good use of the judging evidence tables in the Unit assessment support packages, or similarly constructed centre-devised documents. Centres are encouraged to include a range of possible acceptable answers in their judging evidence information, providing the responses are of the appropriate standard. Some centres devised 'summary' checklists which can be useful for both assessors and candidates, but centres must remember to use these in conjunction with the judging evidence information contained in the assessment support packs since, on occasion, some assessment standards were lost when transposed to checklist formats.

Centres are reminded of the importance of showing how assessment decisions have been made and where internal verification has taken place. Where appropriate, centres should confirm where internal verification comments have been acted on. It was encouraging to see many centres making use of candidate assessment records, or similarly constructed documents, to log assessment judgements for each candidate. Good practice was observed across a range of subjects where centres provided evidence of how judgements had been made in relation to each of the standards being assessed. Some centres annotated candidate evidence to identify where candidates had met each assessment standard, some centres provided detailed assessor commentary, and some provided a combination of both — all of which is to be commended. This kind of practice is indicative of effective internal verification processes in place at centres and assists SQA's verifiers in providing meaningful feedback following the external verification process.

For oral evidence of assessment, centres are reminded to include evidence of the prompt and the candidates' verbal responses when this contributes to the achievement of assessment standards. This could be evidenced via audio files, video recordings or could be captured in a detailed assessor checklist/commentary. If a candidate's response has been checked or clarified orally, then this should be noted on the candidate evidence and/or in the candidate assessment record or similar centre document.

It is recommended that those centres deemed to have been lenient, severe or inconsistent in their application of national standards refer to the wide range of support and resources available to them in their subject areas. This includes the published Understanding Standards materials available on the SQA secure website, which contain exemplification of a range of candidate evidence and judging evidence commentaries. Centres are also encouraged to refer to the published Unit assessment support packs and prior verified material where it is available on the SQA secure website. It would also be useful for centres to refer to subject-specific Round 1 Key Messages reports from current and previous

years — all are available under the banner for *Verification and Course Reports* on the subject pages of SQA's website.

[National Qualifications — list of subjects](#)

Overall, it is encouraging to note that, in the main, centres are applying a holistic and positive approach to judging candidate evidence in accordance with the information in the judging evidence tables.

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## Section 3: General comments

### Generating the evidence sample

The majority of centres had clearly followed the guidance that was issued around the updated sampling requirements for 2015–16 and constructed the appropriate sample of candidate evidence for the levels they were selected for. This guidance is available on SQA's website and centres are reminded to refer to it to ensure that future samples of candidate evidence for external verification are constructed appropriately:

[NQ Verification 2015–16 — generating the evidence sample](#)

### Preparing for external verification

When preparing for external verification, centres should refer to the following documents, which detail the evidence requirements for Unit verification for both event and visiting verification:

- ◆ *Types of verification for Units (September 2015)*
- ◆ *Evidence for visiting verification (September 2015)*
- ◆ *Evidence for verification events (September 2015)*

The documents are published on the [external verification page for National Qualifications](#).

Centres are expected to include all the necessary documentation when submitting evidence for external verification or to have this available to a verifier undertaking a visit. This includes:

- ◆ evidence of the application of internal verification processes
- ◆ the Verification Sample Form — this should indicate which Unit(s) and level(s) candidates were assessed at, and the pass/fail judgement for each candidate\*
- ◆ a completed Candidate Evidence Flyleaf for each candidate (events only)
- ◆ the Unit assessment and information on judging evidence
- ◆ the assessed candidate evidence
- ◆ recording documentation with assessment judgements for each candidate

\*the pass/fail column should reflect the candidate's current position on the basis of the evidence presented for verification, whether this is complete or interim. If all assessment standards presented have been passed, then 'pass' should be recorded. If any have been failed, 'fail' should be recorded.

Ideally, the candidate sample should exemplify a range of candidate performance and assessment judgements. This allows SQA verifiers to provide more effective and relevant feedback. Centres are also reminded that, for verification purposes, it is only necessary to submit evidence that directly relates to the assessment standard(s) being verified.

### **Evidence of internal verification processes**

There were many examples of robust internal verification processes in centres, which had clearly been effective in ensuring the validity of assessment approaches and in facilitating reliable assessment judgements. Verifiers were pleased to observe a number of examples, across the range of subjects, of quality assurance of the assessment and judging evidence tables prior to use with candidates. This is considered good centre practice and ensures that the approach is fit for purpose. It can also assist assessors to identify the range of possible answers to include in the judging evidence tables or similarly constructed documents devised by centres.

In terms of the internal verification of candidate evidence, examples of good practice included the use of comments or initials to show where internal verification had taken place. Some centres provided commentary on their candidate record sheets highlighting where the internal verifier agreed or disagreed with the assessment judgements. This kind of practice is widely encouraged as it has been seen to further develop practitioner understanding of national standards. These processes also help to facilitate accurate, reliable and consistent application of national standards. It was encouraging to see more examples this year of centres working with colleagues across their local authority, to strengthen quality assurance processes. Verifiers were pleased to observe an increase in evidence of dual assessment, cross-marking and sampling.

It is important that centres have an effective internal quality assurance system in place and that evidence of the application of such processes is included for external verification. Centres are reminded that the Internal Verification Toolkit for National Qualifications exists to support the development of internal verification processes in centres and is available at the following link:

[Link to Internal Verification Toolkit](#)



## NQ Verification 2015–16 Common Key Messages Round 2

01

### Section 1: Verification group information

Verification group name:	All
Verification event/visiting information	Event/visiting
Date published:	July 2016

#### National Courses/Units verified:

National 4 added value units (AVUs)

National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher internally assessed components of course assessment (IACCAs)

National 1 – Advanced Higher units

02

### Section 2: Comments on assessment

#### Assessment approaches

In relation to National 4 AVU and National 1 to Advanced Higher unit verification, feedback from verifiers across subjects was largely positive. Centres generally had a clear understanding of the purpose and requirements demanded by the units. The majority of centres used the SQA assessment support packs effectively, either unchanged or with some adaptations to allow more personalisation and choice in topics or contexts to suit the needs of their learners. Allowing personalisation and choice when deciding upon task topics and contexts engages candidates and supports the principles of CfE assessment.

A small number of centres produced evidence based on out-of-date versions of the unit specifications. Centres must ensure they make use of a unit assessment which meets the current unit specification. If centres are using SQA unit assessment support packs, or referring to these in the construction of new assessments, they are reminded to use the latest versions of these from the SQA secure website.

Centres must take care to ensure that the unit assessment standards are not altered by modifications made to the published SQA unit assessment support packs. Where there are significant changes to an SQA unit assessment or centre-devised unit assessments, all centres are strongly encouraged to use SQA's free prior verification service. This will check the validity of the amended or centre-developed assessment instrument to ensure that it allows candidates the opportunity to generate appropriate evidence to meet the outcomes and assessment standards. Requests should be made before the assessment is used with candidates. More information and guidance is available on SQA's [prior verification page](#).

For unit verification including AVUs, where appropriate for the subject, evidence had been produced by candidates in a variety of formats and it was clear that centres had encouraged candidates to use formats suitable for them. Verifiers were pleased to observe more 'naturally occurring' evidence in this round compared to previous. Centres are reminded that naturally occurring evidence is a valid way of assessing candidate performance and progress, provided the candidate evidence meets the appropriate assessment standards.

Centres verified for IACCAs used SQA's National 5/Higher/Advanced Higher course assessment tasks and marking instructions effectively. Across subjects, the quality of candidate work in these internal assessments tended to be very good, which shows that centres have been preparing candidates well at all levels. In certain subjects, a few centres used the previously published course assessment tasks and marking instructions. All centres should check that they are using the most up-to-date tasks and marking instructions from the SQA secure website.

## **Assessment judgements**

Centres are continuing to make reliable and accurate assessment judgements on candidate evidence across unit and course assessment. The majority of assessment judgements were in line with national standards and centres demonstrated clearly where assessment judgements had been made. Many centres showed examples of good practice by including clear assessment commentaries or annotations on candidate scripts to justify their decisions. Good use was made of candidate assessment records or similar centre-devised documents to show clearly the assessment decisions for each candidate in the sample.

For unit assessment, including the AVUs, centres are clearly referring to the judging evidence tables in the unit assessment support packs and are working directly from these, or tailoring them to suit any adaptations made to the assessment. When using a unit assessment support pack, centres should remember to adapt the judging evidence table to their topic/issue by giving suggested responses that they deem to meet the assessment standards. Where verbal discussions had taken place with candidates to check their understanding of a unit assessment standard, an indication on the candidates' evidence of the questions that were used by the assessor, as well as the answers given by the

candidate, allowed verifiers to understand the assessment judgement that had been made.

At AVU verification, there was some evidence of candidates going well beyond the standard required for National 4. Centres should be aware that assessing candidates at different levels in the same subject (for example, National 4 and National 5) could run the risk of over-assessing or under-assessing as assessment standards have different requirements across levels. It is also important that centres consider the volume of assessment being asked of candidates.

At IACCA verification, it was evident that the majority of centres used the course assessment marking instructions reliably, accurately and consistently. Where exemplars exist, centres are strongly encouraged to make use of these — they can be found on the SQA secure website.

Assessors are reminded to check the appropriate guidance around candidate support in the General Assessment Information and to reflect any assistance given in the marks awarded. There should also be assessor comments in the candidate assessment record or equivalent to explain where support was given.

A small number of centres had not applied the marking instructions accurately, leading to severe, lenient or inconsistent assessment judgements. It is recommended that all centres refer to the wide range of assessment support and resources available to them in their subject areas. This includes the published Understanding Standards material available on the SQA secure website, which can be used for standardisation purposes prior to assessment and during internal verification processes. Centres are also reminded of the subject-specific verification key messages and course reports available on the subject pages under 'Verification and Course Reports'.

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## Section 3: General comments

### Internal verification

The majority of centres submitted evidence of internal verification and in most cases this had been effective in both supporting the assessor and in ensuring that approaches to assessment were valid and that assessment judgements were reliable and in line with national standards. Centres should be commended on the range of internal verification evidence that was present in this round across subjects, which included evidence of agreement trials, dual-assessment, cross-assessment, evidence review, double marking, blind marking and sampling as part of internal verification processes. These measures ensure assessment judgement consistency across candidates and between assessor and internal verifier.

A minority of centres presented candidate evidence with no evidence that internal verification had taken place. All centres are reminded that evidence of internal

verification must be submitted along with the candidate evidence for external verification.

The [Internal Verification Toolkit](#) is a suggested approach and SQA recognises that many centres will have well developed processes in place. The toolkit provides additional support in ensuring an effective cycle of quality assurance is in place.

### **Preparation of evidence for external verification**

The overall standard of candidate work and evidence available for verification was high, indicating increasing familiarity and confidence in understanding standards.

Where verification took place as a visit, almost all centres were fully prepared with candidate evidence available and clearly organised. Visits involving live performances allowed candidates to demonstrate their skills and abilities in appropriate contexts. Where verification evidence was submitted for an event, this was generally very well presented and clearly labelled.

Where centres are submitting audio file evidence (eg CDs/MP3/MP4 files), it is recommended that centres check the sound quality of the files that are submitted for verification. CDs need to be able to be played on a range of devices and not solely on the device used for recordings.

Centres are reminded to read all documentation and material thoroughly, and to refer closely to the guidance provided by SQA about the sample of evidence to be submitted and the completion of paperwork. It is important that the candidate evidence flyleaf is completed correctly and attached to the candidate evidence.

All centres should ensure they know exactly what element they are being verified on.