



# **Guide for Qualification Approvers 2015–18**

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# Introduction

## Who is this guide for?

This guide has been developed to support SQA Qualification Approvers (also referred to as 'approver' in parts of this guide). It provides guidance on conducting qualification approval with centres that are completely new to SQA or are already an SQA approved centre and wish to add qualifications to their existing list of approved qualifications.

## What does this guide cover?

The guide covers visiting approval and remote approval.

Part A covers the procedures and practices for qualification approval on behalf of SQA.

Part B covers SQA's Approval Criteria for qualification approval, and the sources of evidence an approver would expect to see before recommending qualification approval to SQA.

Both parts of the guidance relate to the approval of the following types of SQA qualifications:

- ◆ Higher National Certificates and Diplomas (HNC/HND)
- ◆ National Qualifications (other than new National Qualifications)
- ◆ Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQ)
- ◆ Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) Units
- ◆ Customised Awards (CA)
- ◆ Professional Development Awards (PDA)
- ◆ International Vocational Awards (IVA)

## How to use this guide

This guide should be read in conjunction with the Qualification Approval Application Form submitted by the centre that is seeking qualification approval.

Part A of the guide explains the processes you should follow from the point of being allocated an approval by SQA through to making a final approval or non-approval recommendation to SQA.

Part B provides guidance on the type of evidence a centre must provide to satisfy SQA's Approval Criteria and therefore have the potential to become approved to offer the qualification(s) they have applied for.

SQA's Quality Assurance Criteria are grouped under six categories:

- ◆ management of a centre
- ◆ resources

- ◆ candidate support
- ◆ internal assessment and verification
- ◆ external assessment
- ◆ data management

In relation to qualification approval (and qualification verification), we focus on three of these categories: resources, candidate support, and internal assessment and verification.

The other categories, and a number of other criteria in these three categories, are covered by SQA Systems Approvers — you will find details in the mapping document at [http://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/files\\_ccc/QA\\_2015\\_18\\_All\\_Criteria\\_mapping\\_to\\_four\\_processes.pdf](http://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/files_ccc/QA_2015_18_All_Criteria_mapping_to_four_processes.pdf). This document shows who will be responsible (Systems Approver or Qualification Approver) for approving each of SQA's Quality Assurance Criterion.

This guidance has been developed on the premise that the content will mainly be used as a reference source, so it focuses essentially on core approval procedures and associated guidance. However, more information is available in most sections via the links provided.

# Approval: an overview

Centres must seek and obtain approval before offering SQA qualifications.

There are two types of approval:

- ◆ **Systems approval** confirms that the centre has the management and quality assurance systems to support the delivery, assessment and internal verification of SQA qualifications, irrespective of what qualifications they intend to offer.
- ◆ **Qualification approval** confirms that the centre has the staff, reference materials, learning materials, assessment materials, equipment and accommodation needed to deliver, assess and internally verify the qualifications listed on their application.

To offer their first qualification, centres must apply for systems approval, and qualification approval for at least one qualification, at the same time.

When systems and qualification approval have been granted, the centre will be given an SQA centre number and guidance on how to enter candidates.

After gaining systems approval, the centre will only need to seek qualification approval from that point onwards — when they wish to offer additional qualifications. They can apply for approval to offer additional qualifications at any time.

Centres will have to show that they continue to meet SQA's Quality Assurance Criteria as they deliver and assess their approved qualifications. SQA will routinely monitor approved centres to ensure that they continue to have the necessary management and quality assurance systems, and that they meet the assessment and internal verification requirements for the qualifications they are offering. This is known as verification. Please refer to SQA's quality assurance web pages for more information about systems and qualification verification.

## Help available before centres apply for approval

**Centres in the UK** wishing to apply for approval or wanting to find out more about SQA's approval process, are encouraged to call SQA's Business Development and Customer Support team on 0303 333 0330 or e-mail [mycentre@sqa.org.uk](mailto:mycentre@sqa.org.uk).

**International centres** are advised to call SQA Regional Managers on +44 (0) 141 282 6500 or e-mail [sqainternational@sqa.org.uk](mailto:sqainternational@sqa.org.uk).

Centres that have questions about the approval process should contact SQA's Development and Customer Support team, who will be able to answer any initial queries or route queries to an appropriate department/person within SQA. The team have knowledge of SQA's full range of qualifications and are therefore in a strong position to advise centres on the most appropriate qualifications for them based on their particular needs.

The Development and Customer Support team also provide centres with advice on completing the SQA Approval Application Form.

Centres can also access information relating to the approval process, SQA's Approval Criteria and the role of the approver on the quality assurance section of SQA's website.

# Part A: Qualification Approval — procedures and practice

## The qualification approval process

There are two types of approval, visiting approval and remote approval. The approval process remains similar for both, and comprises five main stages, shown in the diagram below. There are slight differences in the way stages 2, 3 and 4 happen in visiting and remote approval, but these are explained in the guidance that follows:



# Stage 1: Prepare for approval

## Preparation for the approver role

The route to becoming a Qualifications Approver usually starts with experience as a Qualifications Verifier. This role involves carrying out quality assurance duties, including qualification verification. The term 'External Verifier' is also used in this guidance, when describing someone who carries out both qualification approval and qualification verification.

You will, of course, be given support to assist you evolve into the Qualification Approver role. As part of your approver responsibilities, you are required to have an in-depth understanding of all documentation, duties, tasks and procedures associated with the approval of qualifications in your subject area. As a new approver, this understanding will come from a combination of:

- ◆ face to face induction training
- ◆ SQA staff support
- ◆ SQA Academy resources
- ◆ research/study

All approvers have a duty to maintain an up to date understanding of the approvals process in relation to the subjects they approve. SQA's policy and procedures on maintaining CPD and recording it (this is a contractual requirement) can be found on [SQA's Appointee Management Website](#).

## Sources of support

As a Qualification Approver, you are required to maintain a comprehensive working knowledge of all approval procedures and associated documentation. This guidance document will provide you with a firm foundation of knowledge, but at times you may need to access more information and this can be accessed via the web links provided in each section.

The following are the main sources of support you will require in your role:

**Source of support****Nature of support**

SQA's QA appointee web pages

Template forms, information about qualification approval and qualification verification policies and procedures.

**Contact details**

For verification activity: tel: 0345 213 5928; e-mail: [gav@sqa.org.uk](mailto:gav@sqa.org.uk)

For approval activity: e-mail: [asv@sqa.org.uk](mailto:asv@sqa.org.uk)

Senior External Verifier (SEV)/colleague, SQA subject specific web pages or Qualifications Development Team

Information and advice about your subject area relating to the standards/Units you are approving and the quality monitoring of Visit Reports

Senior Without Portfolio (SWP)

SWPs support and monitor an allocated number of external verifiers in relation to approval and verification activities, but not in relation to each external verifier's specific subject area.

Mentors

Mentors are appointed by SQA to provide support and carry out accompanied visits for those external verifiers who may temporarily not have access to an SEV or SWP

Quality Enhancement Managers

For information relating to the systems requirements for approved centres

**Contact details**

tel: 0345 213 5189; e-mail: [asv@sqa.org.uk](mailto:asv@sqa.org.uk)

Appointee Management

For information on external verifier qualifications, CPD requirements and courses that can help you develop knowledge and skills as an External Verifier.

**Contact details**

e-mail: [am@sqa.org.uk](mailto:am@sqa.org.uk)

Business Development Managers

For information relating to specific centre and qualification approvals

**Contact details**

tel: 0345 279 1000; tel: 0303 333 0330; e-mail: [mycentre@sqa.org.uk](mailto:mycentre@sqa.org.uk)

## **Essential information**

You need to prepare for qualification approval visits to help ensure they run as smoothly as possible. Possessing all of the right type of information at this stage is essential in enabling you to function fully in your role.

The following types of information are considered essential (although there will be some variation between groups): The tick boxes will help you check-off all of the information you require.

### Information checklist

- SQA's Quality Assurance Criteria (including this guidance document)
- Roles and responsibilities of assessors and internal verifiers
- The Unit/Standards/Evidence Requirements you will be approving
- Assessment Strategy (SVQs) Arrangements Documents (HN)
- Available SQA devised assessment recording materials (including shell portfolios etc)
- SQA devised support materials (Assessor Guides/Candidate Support Packs etc)
- Minutes/Decision Logs of past EV Group Standardisation Meetings
- National standards in i) assessment ii) internal verification iii) external verification
- SQA's Appeals Procedures, Assessment Arrangements Guidance
- Requirements for information management, data protection and confidentiality
- The requirements of the assessment environment including health and safety obligations
- Your own code of conduct in line with verifier role requirements (SQA values) including confidentiality and conflict of interest
- SQA's:
  - [Guide to Assessment](#)
  - [Internal Verification: A Guide for Centres offering SQA Qualifications](#)

## **Being well-informed**

The information in the checklist will support you in your approval duties, but you need to understand and apply it. Centres should be confident that the information and advice they are being given is accurate, up-to-date and consistent across all centres, and that they will be treated fairly and consistently by each approver they deal with.

Evidence tells us that verifiers who are well informed are more likely to be more confident because they feel:

- ◆ assured that the advice and support they are giving is correct and up-to-date
- ◆ secure in the knowledge that their decisions and feedback are based on known SQA policy and procedures

It is important, and of benefit to you, to keep up-to-date with ongoing developments in SQA's quality assurance. These may be communicated in the form of SQA website updates, the QA appointee web pages, e-mails or periodic updates.

## **Introducing SQA's values**

The role of the approver demands a high level of skill, knowledge and consistency, along with a willingness on your part to perform to the best of your ability.

### **Why do we need values?**

SQA's three corporate values define the way SQA staff work with each other, their customers, partners, stakeholders and the wider public, in delivering services for Scotland's learners.

SQA's values are:

- ◆ Trusted
- ◆ Progressive
- ◆ Enabling

Knowing what the corporate values are will help you understand how SQA wishes to engage with you in your role, and how SQA would like you to engage with colleagues and centre staff when carrying out your role.

### **Trusted**

You use open and honest communication with SQA staff, colleague Qualification Verifiers and centre staff. You follow the agreed procedures laid down by SQA staff to ensure a standardised approach to approval is maintained.

### **Progressive**

You view new and unfamiliar approaches to assessment with an open mind, whilst ensuring quality is maintained. You believe that creativity should be seen not as a threat to quality assurance, but an opportunity for improving on existing practice.

### **Enabling**

You understand that by working in partnership with SQA centres you will achieve common goals of excellence and consistency in assessment. You maintain a professional approach at all times, regardless of the challenges you might face in carrying out your work.

### **This section in summary**

There is a shared responsibility between you as an approver and SQA to ensure you are prepared to undertake your role.

SQA will train you and then keep you up-to-date with relevant policies and procedures via information on web pages and periodic e-mailed updates and through providing opportunities for discussion through standardisation meetings and/or discussion forums.

You have a responsibility to prepare yourself as an approver to carry out your role. This is an ongoing responsibility, as approval and verification procedures continue to evolve and there are always aspects of your professional practice that require development. Good CPD planning can assist you with this process. Templates and guidance can be found on the QA appointee web pages.

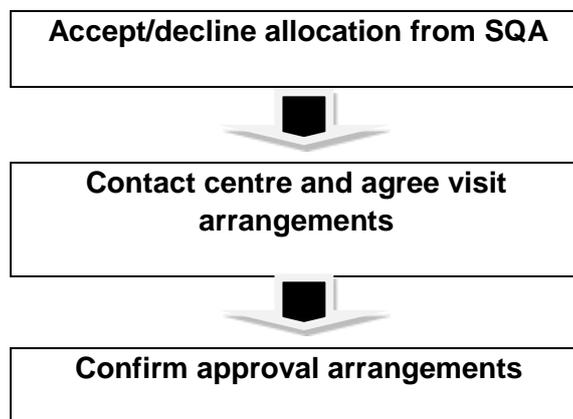
It is your responsibility to operate in line with SQA's values.

## Stage 2: Reviewing the application and planning the approval — visiting approval

### Visiting approval: planning the visit

Thorough visit planning allows you to gather important information prior to a visit, helping you formulate an informed approach to approval for each centre you visit.

The following flow chart outlines the steps in planning a visit. Some of the steps may happen at the same time or very close to one another. The most important point is that steps are not omitted as each step serves an essential quality assurance purpose.



### Approach to approval visit planning

You are advised to use e-mail as a method of communication with centres so there is an auditable trail of communication. It is important that you always use your own personal e-mail address, which should be professional-looking. To ensure data protection, please do not use e-mail addresses that are not your own.

### Accept/decline allocation from SQA

SQA will allocate centres to you periodically throughout the year via e-mail or telephone. Please either accept or decline each allocation within three days. SQA is likely to re-allocate the centre to another Qualification Approver if no response is received within this timescale.

The centre allocated to you will be seeking approval for the Awards/Units in the Verification Group to which you belong. In the case of Customised Awards, they are allocated to you on a 'closest to vocational area' fit, so it is likely you won't have come across the particular Customised Awards/Units you have been asked to approve at this stage, but you will have an appropriate level of understanding of the subject area.

If you feel there is a conflict of interest with any of the centres you have been asked to approve, or if you have queries relating to your approval visit, you should contact SQA's Approvals Section [asv@sqa.org.uk](mailto:asv@sqa.org.uk).

Once you accept your allocated centre, ASV will send you an Approval Visit Form by e-mail.

### **Visiting approval: contact centre and agree visit arrangements**

You should contact the centre within **five days** of receiving the allocation from SQA. The purpose of making contact is to establish an appropriate date and time for the visit.

At this point centres should be given at least three date options from which to choose. At the same time, they should also be given an outline of the documentation you wish to view on the visit. You should also indicate who you would like to have communication with on the visit.

It is not essential for you to communicate with all assessors and verifiers on a visit; a representative sample of assessors and/or verifiers will suffice. **It is not sufficient only to meet with those who manage processes and/or administration associated with assessment and verification.**

### **Confirm approval arrangements**

Once you have agreed the arrangements for your visit, you should communicate this to the centre via an Approval Visit Plan — refer to the [QA Appointee Website](#) for an exemplar completed Approval Visit Plan. Advise the ASV Team via e-mail of the confirmed visit date: [asv@sqa.org.uk](mailto:asv@sqa.org.uk).

The Approval Visit Plan informs the centre of the generic type of information a verifier would expect to see on every visit. There is also space for you to provide an outline of your visit, informing the centre of who you wish to speak with and what specific information you require to see. Providing this information in the Approval Visit Plan helps the centre prepare for your visit.

## Stage 2: Reviewing the application — remote approval

Remote approval is sometimes referred to as postal approval.

SQA may at times ask you to conduct approval remotely instead of carrying out a visit. The term remote approval means approving a centre's compliance in relation to SQA's Quality Assurance Criteria from a distance, eg from your home, rather than carrying out a physical visit to a centre's premises.

The decision by SQA to conduct an approval remotely will be decided on a number of factors, such as:

- ◆ previous successful verification visits
- ◆ the risk factors involved if a physical visit is not conducted
- ◆ recommendations of a Qualification Approver and/or Systems Approver

SQA will advise you if a remote approval should be carried out. Where this is the case, SQA will communicate this to you rather than you having to decide.

### Accept/decline allocation from SQA

SQA will allocate centres to you periodically throughout the year via e-mail or telephone. Please either accept or decline each allocation within three days. SQA is likely to re-allocate the centre to another Qualification Approver if no response is received within this timescale.

The centre allocated to you will be seeking approval for the Awards/Units in the Verification Group to which you belong. In the case of Customised Awards, they are allocated to you on a 'closest to vocational area' fit, so it is likely you won't have come across the particular Customised Awards/Units you have been asked to approve at this stage, but you will have an appropriate level of understanding of the subject area.

If you feel there is a conflict of interest with any of the centres you have been asked to approve, or if you have queries relating to your approval visit, you should contact SQA's Approvals Section [asv@sqa.org.uk](mailto:asv@sqa.org.uk).

Upon acceptance by you, ASV will confirm your name to the centre.

### Review the application

Within **five days** of accepting the allocation from SQA, review the application and associated files sent to you by e-mail from SQA. In some cases, more information may be available from the website of the centre seeking approval.

The information made available to you by SQA (and originally submitted by the centre) will help you judge the centre's fitness to become approved in relation to SQA's Approval Criteria.

If after reviewing the evidence you conclude that it is sufficient, you should complete the Approval Report and send it to SQA. In your report you will be making a recommendation to SQA that the centre is approved to offer the qualification(s) it has applied for.

Where further information is required, you should e-mail the centre directly advising them of the requirements (Please always cc in [asv@sqa.org.uk](mailto:asv@sqa.org.uk)). The Systems Approver tasked with the Systems Approval component of the approval process can in some instances (at your or SQA's request) ask the centre while undertaking a systems approval visit to provide missing evidence requirements. If you think this is necessary please contact ASV and discuss your requirements and they will advise if this is possible.

If the systems approval visit has not taken place and you require their assistance, you must include e-mail [asv@sqa.org.uk](mailto:asv@sqa.org.uk) detailing the information required and it must directly relate to the approval criteria, and should be clearly worded, to avoid any ambiguity. Please remember the Systems Approver is not a subject expert, therefore you must be precise in terms of the information you require and be realistic about what the Systems Approver can gather during their visit.

It is important that you remember that the Systems Approver will collect information based upon the information provided in the e-mail. They will not make any judgement in relation to the information being sought — this is your role.

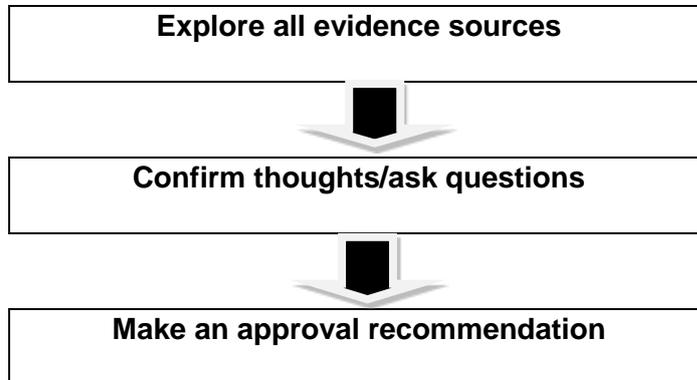
It is also possible for you to request a direct communication session with the centre. From this point onwards the term 'communication session' is used to cover video conferencing, audio conferencing, telephone communication and any other type of communication method used.

If you request a communication session with the centre, you will be asked to detail in your e-mail to ASV your availability within the following three weeks. It is possible that having requested a communication session, it may no longer be required once the additional information received from the Systems Approver has been made available to you. If this is the case, you should contact the centre to indicate that a communication session is no longer required.

**Note: You are advised to use e-mail as a method of communication with centres. It is important that you always use your own personal e-mail address, which should be professional looking. To ensure data protection, please do not use e-mail addresses which are not your own.**

## Stage 3: Carry out approval: visiting approval

When carrying out an approval visit, the following stages can be applied:



### Explore all evidence sources

The completed approval application will include evidence in support of each approval criterion. Centres can access guidance on the type of evidence/arrangements required to make a successful submission in SQA's Systems and Qualification Approval Guide (August 2015). This publication can be found on SQA's Quality Assurance Website. An extract from that guidance is included in Part B of this guidance so you can access the same information on mandatory and possible sources of evidence.

The information made available to you prior to the visit, and on the visit itself, will help you judge the centre's fitness to become approved against SQA's Approval Criteria.

It is important when considering evidence sources that you only make judgements about the quality and sufficiency of evidence once you have gathered information from all possible evidence sources. Sometimes, evidence sources will be obvious and stated, whilst at other times perhaps less obvious or clearly stated. When this is the case, your role is to try and tease out any hidden or less obvious evidence sources.

Sometimes the reasons for not immediately being able to recognise evidence sources is that the centre is using different names/terms for documentation that serve the same purpose, eg Assessment Plans are sometimes called Assessment Schedules or Action Plans. It is therefore important not to make assumptions about evidence that initially appears to be lacking — it may be that the centre doesn't understand what is actually required, but may have relevant evidence.

## **Confirm thoughts/ask questions**

Once all evidence sources have been explored, you may have a number of things you wish to ask questions about or confirm with the centre. This stage of the process is important in helping you weigh up all of the available information before you make your recommendations. Depending on what you still need to find out/confirm, this stage of the process may include:

- ◆ re-visiting centre documentation
- ◆ further conversations with staff
- ◆ discussion with SQA Appointees/Staff
- ◆ any combination of the above

Centre discussions are an important part of the approval process. They help you as an approver understand the context of the approval application and can help identify unstated and/or alternative evidence to support the centre's application.

## **Making an approval recommendation**

Before making an approval recommendation, it is essential that you weigh up all the available information. It is important to bear in mind when doing this that you are judging the centre's potential to deliver the qualifications it has applied for. This means taking a balanced approach, neither accepting less nor requiring more than is specified in SQA's Qualification Approval Criteria.

Once you are in a position to make a recommendation to SQA, you can make one of two recommendations:

- ◆ approval
- ◆ non-approval

A recommendation for approval means that you believe the centre has provided you with sufficient and relevant evidence to meet all of SQA's approval requirements.

A recommendation for non-approval essentially means that one or more of SQA's requirements has not been met. In this situation, the centre will have to submit another Application Form to SQA.

Where you make a recommendation of non-approval, you must clearly state why this is the case, and discuss with the centre the options they could choose to enable them to gain approval. A Summary of your discussions should be provided in your Approval Report (a blank Approval Report will have been sent to you by ASV with the centre's Approval Application Form and accompanying evidence).

## **Stage 3: Carry out approval: remote approval**

### **Organise and take part in communication session with centre (if required)**

Once you have decided that a communication session is required, you should contact the centre to agree the format and timing of the session, at the same time making reference to the outstanding information/evidence required as detailed in the e-mail to ASV — this essentially provides the agenda for the forthcoming session.

In preparation for the session, you should ensure you have reminded yourself of the outstanding information/evidence and the related Approval Criteria. During the session, you should have all of the information to hand — eg all of the centre documentation, the e-mail with the requirements and any related SQA guidance.

After the session, you may still have matters that require explanation or require confirmation, in which case you may need to have further conversations with SQA Appointees/Staff.

In exceptional cases it may be necessary to contact the centre again to clarify information or to seek additional evidence to allow an appropriate recommendation to be made.

### **Make an approval recommendation via the Approval Report**

Whilst it is reasonable to take note of the result of a systems visit, which predominantly relates to the centre's generic policies and procedures, as the Qualification Approver, your focus is on whether or not the centre has the capability to successfully offer the qualification(s) it has applied for. As the subject expert, you are in the best position to make this judgement, and you should do this by objectively weighing up all the available evidence in relation to the Approval Criteria.

The one main difference between visiting approval and remote approval is that during visiting approval the recommendation you make to SQA via your report will also be communicated by you to the centre at the end of the visit. For remote approval, the recommendation for approval or non-approval will mainly be communicated via your completed Approval Report.

## Stage 4: Communicate an approval recommendation

The following flow chart outlines the stages associated with planning your feedback and then communicating what you intend to recommend to SQA to centre staff. This stage only applies to visiting approval — centres who have undergone remote or postal approval will find out about their approval recommendation when they receive their Approval Report.



### Plan to deliver balanced feedback

It is important that feedback is given in a place where it cannot be overheard by those not directly involved in the visit. Confidentiality must be a prime consideration.

It is important that the feedback given to centre staff includes positive comments on the Approval Criteria you felt were fully met. You should give comments on your recommendations if you feel there is scope for enhancing the centre's proposed arrangements for offering the qualifications, though centres do not have to act on these types of recommendations.

Where you feel there is insufficient evidence, you should inform the centre of specifically what you consider the shortfall to be and how they can address it when they submit a further Application Form to SQA.

It is recommended that you take some time between making your decision and delivering feedback. Well-structured and balanced feedback is more likely to be better understood, have more of an impact and be received in the way that it is meant if it has been thought through and can be justified.

We can't be specific about the time that should be given to providing feedback. However, there is generally a recognition that time spent on this phase is time well spent if the efforts of all concerned are to be given the appropriate level of importance and value. There is an investment in time and effort by:

- ◆ each centre in reaching the point of providing you with all of the documentation for your visit
- ◆ you in terms of organising the visit, planning it, conducting it, and writing up reports
- ◆ SQA in terms of co-ordinating the approval process

## **Explain your recommendations to centre staff**

The investments by all concerned culminate in the outcome of the approval visit, so the communication of the visit outcome, carried in the detail and quality of the feedback you provide, is of vital importance to SQA and its centres.

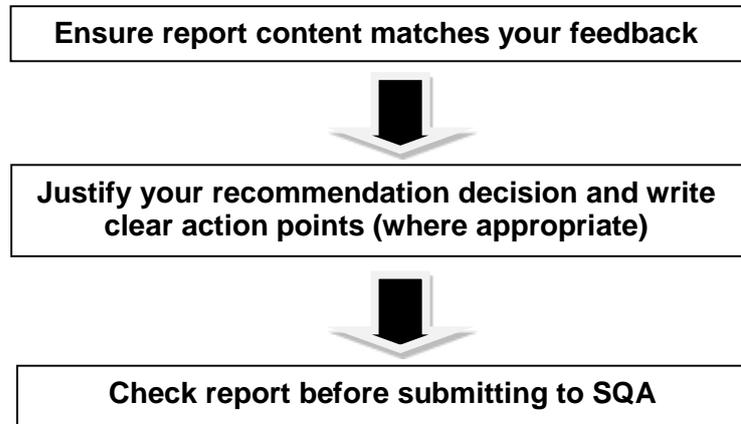
Centre staff should be encouraged to ask questions to clarify any points during this period of communication.

In some instances centres may challenge your recommendation decision. This only happens on rare occasions but if it does, it is important that you can give the centre a clear rationale for the decision you have made.

Should any of the centres you visit remain unhappy with the approval decision you are recommending, they have the right to appeal to SQA. Where you suspect this might be the case, you should advise the centre that they have this right and provide them with information on how to access SQA's Appeals Procedure.

## Stage 5: Completing the Approval Report

The following flow chart outlines the stages in writing up your report and checking it before submitting it to SQA.



Your report should not hold any surprises. If you have fed back that the centre has all of the documentation in place to potentially become approved, then this should go into your report. Recommendations should never be altered or extended post-visit after feedback has been given and agreed.

### Recording recommendation decisions that you can justify

As the focus on recommending or not recommending approval is based on establishing sufficiency of evidence in relation to each criterion, you are looking for evidence of what the centre is actually doing to show they comply.

The comments section for each criterion in the Approval Report should include the sources of evidence you have found (or not found) to justify your overall recommendation. Where you feel there is insufficient evidence, you should inform centres of what you consider the shortfall(s) to be and how they can address it when they submit a further Application Form to SQA.

This should be recorded in your report.

### Checking your report before submitting it to SQA

#### Naming staff and candidates in reports

It is permissible to name centre staff, eg Assessors, Internal Verifiers and Centre Co-ordinators in visit plans or Approval Reports. For data protection reasons it is not permissible to mention the names of candidates.

#### Reports should be written professionally

Reports should be written in clear and concise language, avoiding the overuse of technical jargon.

Read your report back for overall cohesiveness and clarity.

Check your reports for accuracy, spelling and grammar before submitting to SQA.

The following SQA publications can assist you with report writing:

[http://www.sqa.org.uk/files\\_ccc/Writing\\_for\\_SQA\\_part\\_A.pdf](http://www.sqa.org.uk/files_ccc/Writing_for_SQA_part_A.pdf)

[http://www.sqa.org.uk/files\\_ccc/Writing\\_for\\_SQA\\_part\\_B.pdf](http://www.sqa.org.uk/files_ccc/Writing_for_SQA_part_B.pdf)

### **Submitting your report to SQA**

It is advisable to write your report as soon after the visit or remote approval as possible, when the details are still fresh in your mind. SQA guidelines state you must complete and submit your report within five working days.

### **After submitting your report to SQA**

Once you have submitted your report to SQA, an Approval Officer will scrutinise it, and if it is accepted, a summary letter will be sent to the centre informing them of SQA's Approval Decision.

### **Electronic housekeeping**

Qualification Approvers have a duty of care in the way they use and dispose of information provided to undertake approval, including visit plans, approval reports and any ancillary documents sent to you associated with the approval application.

Once approval is complete and the report has been submitted and approved by SQA, you should remove all the data relating to the approval from personal computers or data sticks.

# Part B: Qualification Approval Criteria and guidance

Based on Part B of the *Systems and Qualification Approval Guide for Centres*, this guidance has been adapted for Qualification Approvers. It specifically covers each section of the Approval Application Form, providing guidance on the information and evidence SQA requires from centres at the application stage.

## 1: Qualification(s) centre may wish to offer

**Qualification approval relates to three specific categories of criteria: resources, candidate support, and internal assessment and verification.**

Centres can find out which qualifications SQA offers, by searching on SQA's home page by qualification family, eg HN, SVQ, or by titles or words that appear in titles. SQA's Business Development/International team can also advise centres on available qualifications.

Centres intending to offer Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQs), first of all need to obtain a copy of the most up-to-date and relevant sector skills council (SSC) Assessment Strategy. They can do this by contacting SQA's Business Development/International team.

Centres wishing to offer other SQA qualifications are advised to establish if there are documents that accompany the Unit specifications, such as Course specifications or Group Award specifications, as these may contain details that affect the choice of qualification(s) and the type of resources centres need to put in place.

### Completing the Qualification Approval Application Form

**B1 Centre contact details:** Centres are asked to provide the name and address of their centre, to ensure that this is linked to the Systems Approval Application Form.

**B2 Key Contact Points:** Centres are asked to provide the name and contact details of your SQA Co-ordinator, and of the person who completed the qualification Approval Application Form (if different from the SQA Co-ordinator).

**B3 Type of qualification** Centres do not need to submit separate application forms for qualifications in the same subject or occupational areas. This is explained on the Application Form.

**B4 qualification and Units:** Centres should indicate the qualifications they are seeking approval to offer (and confirm the first six Units to be delivered for Higher National awards).

**B5 Appendices for Additional Qualifications:** Centres are requested to complete and attach the Additional Qualification form if their application is for more than one qualification.

## **2: Resources**

**Criterion 2.1: Assessors and internal verifiers must be competent to assess and internally verify, in line with the requirements of the qualification.**

**Criterion 2.4: There must be evidence of initial and ongoing reviews of assessment environments; equipment; and reference, learning and assessment materials.**

### **Completing the Qualification Approval Application Form**

**B6.1 Staff Details:** Centres need to complete the form: 'Supporting Document: Staff Qualifications and Experience' for each staff member listed so that SQA can confirm that the centre has appropriately qualified staff. Full qualification titles rather than abbreviations should be used, telling SQA where and when they were gained, giving a brief outline of the experience staff have in relation to the qualification/Units they will be assessing and/or verifying.

**B6.2 Sites:** Sites to be used should be listed.

**B6.3 Partnerships:** If centres intend to offer qualifications in partnership, then it must be clear who is responsible for which part of the delivery, assessment and internal verification process. The centre named on the approval application will enrol candidates for SQA qualifications and has the overall responsibility for ensuring the quality of delivery, assessment and internal verification even if the centre does not perform one or more of these functions.

**B6.4 Assessment Environments:** In relation to the qualifications centres are applying to offer, they should describe the environments (locations) candidates will be assessed in, taking account of any Assessment Strategy requirements for SVQs or any Unit specifications, operational handbook, Arrangements document/Group

**B6.5 Equipment:** A list of the equipment centres will use to enable them to offer the applied for Units/Awards should be made available.

**B6.6 Reference and Learning Materials:** Centres should specify the learning and reference materials they will be using.

### **Staff details**

#### **SVQ assessors/verifiers**

SVQ assessors/verifiers must have the technical experience and skills and/or qualifications as stated in their sector's Assessment Strategy. Each strategy is

written by a sector skills council that has responsibility for one or more designated occupational areas. Centres coming forward for approval should always refer to the relevant Assessment Strategy for information relating to experience, skills and qualifications.

SVQ assessor/verifiers — unless otherwise stated in an Assessment Strategy, SVQ assessors/verifiers must hold or be working towards the following Assessor/Verifier qualifications within 18 months of commencing their role.

- ◆ L&D9D: Assess Workplace Competence Using Direct Methods (L&D9D)
- ◆ L&D9DI: Assess Workplace Competence Using Direct and Indirect Methods (L&D9DI)
- ◆ L&D11: Internally Monitor and Maintain the Quality of Workplace Assessment (L&D11)
- ◆ QCF Workplace Assessor/Verifier Qualifications

With appropriate, planned continuing professional development (CPD), the following qualifications are also acceptable:

- ◆ A1: Assess Candidates using a Range of Methods
- ◆ A2: Assess Candidates' Performance through Observation
- ◆ V1: Conduct Internal Quality Assurance of the Assessment Process
- ◆ TQFE/TQSE (appropriate for assessor role only for SVQs)

### **QCF assessors/verifiers**

It is recommended that QCF assessors/verifiers either hold or are working towards a nationally-recognised assessor/verifier qualification. This is not a mandatory requirement unless specified in a Unit specification. Competence in assessment or internal verification can be demonstrated by:

- ◆ holding other qualifications that include relevant and sufficient assessment or verification components or
- ◆ providing evidence of having successfully practised as an assessor and/or verifier of awarding organisation qualifications

QCF assessor verifiers must also have the particular technical experience and skills and/or qualifications as stated in their sector's Assessment Strategy/Unit specification.

### **HN and NQ Units**

Assessors and internal verifiers must have the required up-to-date occupational experience and/or subject understanding, and where stipulated, relevant qualifications and CPD. Where these stipulations exist, they will be contained in one of the following: Assessment Strategy, Unit specification, operational handbook, Arrangements Document/Group Award strategy document.

HN and NQ assessors and internal verifiers also need to be competent in assessment (or internal verification) of the type involved in the qualification. This

could mean providing experience of current assessment/verification practice in line with the qualification requirements

In addition, a relevant qualification in assessment/verification would be best practice but not essential unless a specific requirement of the Assessment Strategy, Unit specification, operational handbook, Arrangements/Group Award strategy document.

The following assessor and internal verifier qualifications (this is not an exhaustive list) are acceptable for assessing and internally verifying HN Units:

- ◆ TQFE/TQSE
- ◆ Conduct the Assessment Process
- ◆ Carry Out the Assessment Process
- ◆ Conduct the Internal Verification Process
- ◆ Internally Verify the Assessment Process

Any of the qualifications listed under Scottish Vocational Qualifications are also acceptable (although the L&D/Workplace QCF Assessor/Verifier Units cannot be achieved by assessing/verifying HN/NQ Units).

Other qualifications are also acceptable as long as they include relevant and sufficient assessment or verification components.

### **Customised qualifications**

The document *Recognising Assessor and Verifier Skills and Knowledge: a guide for centres offering customised awards* has details of the qualifications and experience that are required for centres to deliver Customised Awards and includes recent assessor/verifier eligibility/CPD guidance developed by the Customised Awards team.

### **Sites**

A site is the location where assessment takes place. Before offering a qualification, and periodically thereafter, centres should review resources across all sites to ensure they are appropriate and up to date. Centres may wish to use a site checklist whenever they review their resources, regardless of whether they own the site or not, but a site checklist is not required for sites that are centre-owned. If centres don't use a site checklist, they must have a policy and procedure covering which resources will be reviewed and how this will be done. This is covered under Systems approval, criterion 2.5.

### **Assessment environments for all sites used**

The sites used by each centre should provide assessment environments that help candidates to achieve their qualifications in full without restrictions. The environment must also ensure their health and safety and provide for any technical/specialist needs.

It is important that centres are familiar with the content of the Units and Assessment Strategy/Arrangements/Course tutor guide documents so that they can form a judgement concerning the suitability of their assessment environment(s).

### **Equipment**

SQA must be satisfied that centres have sufficient equipment to allow every candidate to meet the requirements of the qualification at the assessment sites being used. Centres should check this before applying for approval to offer qualifications.

If centres intend to use shared resources, such as specialised reference materials or equipment, they must provide a partnership arrangement document. Refer to Section B6.3 of the Qualification Approval Application Form.

This completed and signed document must show that agreement has been obtained from the owners of the resources.

### **Learning materials**

Learning materials can be provided in a variety of different forms to suit the subjects being delivered. Examples might include web-based or hard copy materials such as:

- ◆ induction hand-outs/handbooks
- ◆ course exercises, research briefs, case studies, projects, assignments, lesson plans that identify learning materials
- ◆ media clips, blogs, video, website sources
- ◆ technical publications

### **Reference materials**

Reference materials help candidates maintain up-to-date skills and/or knowledge in their chosen subject areas and can include:

- ◆ trade/professional websites, journals or textbooks
- ◆ media clips, blogs, video, website sources
- ◆ technical publications

In the case of vocational qualifications, reference materials can also relate to employee handbooks, work instructions, procedures, manuals and codes of practice held in the candidate's workplace.

### **Resources: additional sources of evidence**

Sector assessment strategies can be found by searching under VQ Group type on SQA's website: [Assessor and internal verifier qualifications: a quick reference guide](#).

Health and safety in relation to accommodation and equipment is an ongoing responsibility for all those operating in the assessment environment. In line with the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974, candidates/staff should be clear about the procedures for identifying and reporting

[Recognising assessor and verifier skills and knowledge: a guide for centres offering customised awards.](#)

### **3: Candidate support**

**Criterion 3.2: Candidates' development needs and prior achievements (where appropriate) must be matched against the requirements of the award.**

**Criterion 3.3: Candidates must have scheduled contact with their assessor in order to review their progress and to revise their assessment plans accordingly.**

Criteria 3.1, 3.4, 3.5 and 3.6 are covered under Systems Approval, Part A.

#### **Completing the Qualification Approval Application Form**

**B7.1 Candidate Needs and Award Requirements:** Centres should provide information on how they will identify the prior achievements and development needs of candidates before or at the start of their Units/qualification and take a targeted approach to help candidates achieve their qualifications.

**B7.2 Candidate Contact with Assessors:** Centres should provide information on how they will ensure that assessors maintain regular contact with candidates throughout the life of their qualification so that progression can be monitored and timely information and support provided.

#### **Candidate development needs**

Prior achievements will include previously gained experience, knowledge, skills and/or qualifications.

The identification of prior achievement at the commencement stage helps ensure that candidates satisfy any qualification entry requirements.

The matching of needs is based on the knowledge/skills candidates already have in relation to the Units they are aiming to achieve. This ensures that candidates undertake a programme that is at an appropriate level, with relevant content.

The result of the matching process could range from 'no/very little development required' to 'significant development' required. 'No/very little development' can be appropriate for eg SVQ candidates who have enough experience to go straight to assessment for the majority of Units they are enrolled for.

In the case of taught programmes, such as those associated with HN and NQ Units and qualifications (this can also apply to some VQ programmes) the general development needs of candidates are usually matched against the award requirements at the programme/course design stage, and then factored into the learning, teaching and assessment plans.

Centres are advised to document what their processes will be for the identification and addressing of needs.

### **Contact with assessors**

Maintaining contact is a key assessor responsibility, the purpose being to review candidate progress, provide necessary advice/support, and consequently revise assessment plans. This process could be in relation to Outcomes/Units/evidence in relation to the overall qualification.

Contact should ensure candidates are clear in terms of their progress and in relation to where they are within the assessment process and what will be happening next.

Centres should document the processes they will use for ensuring that candidates have regular contact with their assessors.

## **4: Internal assessment and verification**

### **Assessment materials (including methods/instruments of assessment)**

**Criterion 4.2: Internal assessment and verification procedures must be implemented to ensure standardisation of assessment.**

**Criterion 4.3: Assessment instruments and methods and their selection and use must be valid, reliable, practicable, equitable and fair.**

**Criterion 4.4: Assessment evidence must be the candidate's own work, generated under SQA's required conditions.**

**Criterion 4.6: Evidence of candidates' work must be accurately and consistently judged by assessors against SQA's requirements.**

**Criterion 4.7: Candidate evidence must be retained in line with SQA requirements.**

**Criterion 4.9: Feedback from Qualification Verifiers must be disseminated to staff and used to inform assessment practice.**

Criteria 4.1, 4.5 and 4.8 are covered under Systems approval, Part A.

## **Completing the Qualification Approval Application Form**

### **B8.1 Assessment Materials (Including Methods/Instruments of**

**Assessment):** For Scottish Vocational Qualifications, centres should describe how they will approach assessment for the SVQ Units they intend to offer. They could provide example assessment plans, observation checklists, solutions to questions etc, which can be centre-devised or SQA-devised where available.

For HN Units, centres must provide the assessment materials they will be using for a minimum of six Units, or for all Units if fewer than six in total are being approved, even if they are using SQA-devised assessments. (These should be made available for the Qualification Approver.) The assessment materials must comprise the instruments/methods of assessment (eg projects, assignments, case studies) and marking schemes for these Units. The assessment materials can be centre-devised or SQA-devised, where available.

**Standardisation arrangements:** Centres should describe their arrangements for achieving standardisation to help ensure consistent, reliable and fair assessment decisions are made.

**Internal verification of materials:** We ask centres to state who developed their assessment materials and confirm that they have been subject to internal verification using the centre's arrangements for achieving standardisation, to help ensure consistent, reliable and fair assessment decisions are made.

### **Assessment materials**

Assessment materials are required to measure candidate knowledge and skills and come in the form of case studies, assignments, questions and answers, and observation checklists. Centres are advised to refer to SQA's Guide to Assessment for further details in relation to the qualifications they wish to offer.

As well as centre-devised assessment materials, materials can also be purchased from a third party, for example an off-the-shelf electronic portfolio system with built-in question banks for SVQs.

SQA exemplar assessment instruments are also available for many HN Units.

Centres can choose to use these if you wish but they must still be subject to internal verification. We recommend referring to SQA's Guide to Assessment if centre-devised materials are being developed. This publication covers instruments/ methods of assessment and the benefits of adopting a holistic/integrated approach when planning assessments.

It is important that centres make sure SQA assessment exemplars are used in a context appropriate to the delivery of the Unit and to the Group Award of which it forms a part. Although the content of an exemplar has been prior-verified by SQA as a suitable instrument of assessment, using an SQA assessment exemplar does not automatically guarantee successful qualification verification/approval. It

is still the centre's responsibility to make sure that all the appropriate internal quality assurance procedures are satisfactorily completed at the approval stage.

### **Standardisation arrangements**

Standardisation activities/meetings can help support assessors at all stages of the assessment process and support the principles of reliability, consistency and fairness in assessment. At the outset, agreeing instruments of assessment/assessment materials helps ensure validity in assessment — and that all staff are working with the same materials.

During assessment, periodic standardisation activities/meetings can support assessors and verifiers in making accurate and consistent judgements by tuning each assessor/verifier into the others understanding of the Unit requirements, helping identify any 'grey areas'.

Physical meetings remain the most common mechanism for standardisation, but there are other methods that can also be used to achieve interactive standardisation; for example, the use of discussion forums, e-mail exchange, webinars, tele/video conferencing.

### **Internal verification**

All assessment materials, regardless of origin, whether they are SQA-devised, centre-devised or third-party-devised must be subject to internal verification to help ensure validity and reliability in assessment.

### **Seeking subject expert advice**

For HNs, if centres are currently approved by SQA, and their assessment materials are centre-devised and not yet prior-verified, they are advised to request this be done by SQA. This may be obtained at any time by forwarding a request along with the assessment materials to SQA's Quality Assurance Logistics team who will provide feedback from a subject expert.

If centres are not currently an approved centre, and they would like technical advice in relation to the Units/Awards they wish to offer, they should in the first instance contact one of SQA's Business Development/International team.

## **Completing the Qualification Approval Application Form**

**B8.2 Candidate evidence:** Centres must have a system in place for ensuring candidates understand the evidence they submit for assessment is purely their own work.

This can be achieved by the centres providing their policy and procedures for ensuring authenticity of candidate evidence.

**B8.3 External Quality Assurance:** Centres are asked to describe the arrangements they have in place (supported with procedures where applicable)

for ensuring SQA verifiers have appropriate access to candidate evidence during verification events.

### **Authenticity of candidate evidence**

SQA's Your Coursework web page covers information widely available to centres and candidates on topics such as plagiarism and collusion and can be applied to the assessment of HNs, VQ/QCF Units and Customised Awards.

### **Retention of candidate evidence**

Quality assurance requires centres to retain all candidate evidence for the Group Award/Units until at least three weeks after the official completion date. If they are contacted by the Qualification Verifier before three weeks after the completion date, all candidate evidence must be retained until after verification has taken place.

### **Internal assessment and verification: additional sources of information**

[Guide to Assessment](#)

[Internal Verification: A Guide for Centres offering SQA Qualifications](#)

[Internal verification: A Guide for Centres offering Ofqual Regulated Qualifications](#)

### **Completing the Qualification Approval Application Form**

**B9 E-assessment:** Some SQA qualifications are externally assessed using e-assessment systems. Centres are asked at this stage to confirm if they require access to SOLAR or Safe Road User Online.

#### **E-assessment materials**

If centres intend using e-assessment, they need to describe how this will operate, taking account of the following:

- ◆ How they will ensure that there is sufficient access to hardware for assessment purposes?
- ◆ Does the software to be used for assessment meet SQA specifications and standards (see e-assessment page on SQA's website)?
- ◆ Is there a system in place for password-protecting assessment material, authenticating candidate assessments, and ensuring that candidates do not have privileged access to other materials during assessment?
- ◆ Does the centre have a contingency plan to cover system failures?
- ◆ How will candidates be advised that computer-generated results are provisional until the verification process has been completed?

### **Completing the Qualification Approval Application Form**

**B10 Declaration:** To allow SQA to process Centre Approval/Qualification Approval Application Forms, the Head of Centre or SQA Co-ordinator (whose

details are indicated in the application form held by SQA) should confirm that the information supplied on the form is accurate.