



Scottish Vocational Qualifications Internal Assessment Report 2014 Management

The purpose of this report is to provide feedback to centres on verification in Scottish Vocational Qualifications in this subject.

SVQ awards

General comments

This verification group covers the following awards:

GC49 22: SVQ 2 in Team Leading at SCQF level 5

GC46 23: SVQ 3 in Management at SCQF level 7

GC47 24: SVQ 4 in Management at SCQF level 9

GC48 25: SVQ 5 in Management at SCQF level 11

These awards are now in their third year of operation, which means that the majority of centres delivering these awards are very familiar with the standards and the assessment strategy. New optional Units were added to the SVQ structures in April 2013 and while a number of centres are including these Units in their offer, uptake of these Units is relatively low.

The support materials developed by SQA continue to be of great assistance, helping to clarify the knowledge and understanding for the Units for which they are available. Candidates are very complimentary about these materials and the materials continue to be reviewed to ensure relevance and currency. Overall, centres are very positive regarding the support provided for these awards and all the centres appear to be well aware of the requirements of the standards in the Management SVQs.

It is also worth repeating that this verification group also includes seven Professional Development Awards (PDAs), each of which consists of two Units drawn from the Management standards. The PDAs provide a useful entry route for candidates who may wish to pursue a full SVQ qualification at a later date, and/or can provide useful underpinning to management development/leadership development programmes within organisations, whether these be public, private or third-sector organisations.

Unit specifications, instruments of assessment and exemplification materials

As indicated earlier, the majority of assessors and internal verifiers have been involved with SVQ Management for some time and, as well as knowing the Unit specifications well, are also used to working with the portfolio method of assessment normally used for SVQ Management.

Where there have been changes in assessment/verification teams the majority of centres have strong recruitment and selection procedures and induction arrangements for new members. These processes include a range of good practice: such as new assessors being shadowed by existing assessors; allowing new assessors to make provisional assessment decisions which can then be formally discussed with experienced assessors and internal verifiers and; sampling plans which reflect the level of risk associated with new assessors. A

few centres have developed performance management systems designed to provide support to new and existing centres. Such approaches ensure that the delivery team is fully aware of the requirements of the standards, any changes to the standards, and of course the assessment strategy for Management SVQs.

Continuing professional development (CPD) is a key element in ensuring that assessors and verifiers are aware of changes or updates to the standards and assessment approaches. The majority of centres demonstrated strong CPD processes and support systems for their assessors and verifiers, which ensure that staff maintain their knowledge of the standards. It was heartening to see this in action at the well-attended network meeting in June where, among other things, changes to the evidencing of the behaviour element of the standards (see later) were discussed. It is important to note here that CPD should include, in addition to assessment/verification needs, development relating to Management. In general, three management activities are sought.

The SQA support materials continue, as stated earlier, to be seen as particularly helpful for the 'knowledge and understanding' sections of the Units, and centres frequently comment at External Verifiers' visits on how valuable they are to the delivery team, as well as commenting on their value to candidates. Centres make use of them in different ways but one approach is to get candidates to work through a support pack as the first step in undertaking a Unit. The responses to the activities can then be used as evidence for knowledge and understanding.

Centres continue to develop their own resource materials to assist candidates. This includes generic material such as advice on portfolio building; how to write narrative/reflective accounts; how and when to use witness testimony, as well as specific guidance on particular Units such as knowledge questions, potential sources and types of evidence for a Unit. These help to ensure that assessors and verifiers are able to fully support candidates in understanding the requirements of the Management standards.

Evidence Requirements

Clear guidance is provided by SQA within the *Assessment Strategy for the SVQs in Management* regarding the evidence requirements of each Unit. Over the years this has been largely unchanged. However, the new optional Units introduced in April 2013 were in a slightly different format from the other Management SVQ Units. A key difference is the behaviours. The statement accompanying the behaviours of the new optional Units states that '*when performing to this standard, you are likely to demonstrate the following behaviours*' whereas the statement for the Units accredited in 2011 is '*you will exhibit the following behaviours*'.

SQA has until now required the behaviours to be assessed. However, following a recent Awarding Body Forum meeting with Skills CFA and discussions with SQA's Accreditation department, it was advised that while behaviours are desirable and likely to be demonstrated through performance, they do not need to be assessed. Therefore, behaviours should be used as guidance on how the performance criteria should be achieved, but not assessment in themselves. This

was communicated through SQA's website and discussed at the network meeting in June 2014. All External Verifiers have discussed the change when carrying out a visit.

It is important to note that the responsibility to provide the evidence that demonstrates that they meet the requirements of the awards still sits with the candidate. This requires the candidate to become familiar with the standards and how the standards relate to their current performance and the evidence they provide. This should ensure that candidates understand the standards and put candidates in a better position to demonstrate how they meet the standards through evidence based on their current performance. In summary, candidates must, for every Unit, provide evidence which shows that their performance as managers meets the Performance Criteria of the Unit and that they possess the knowledge and understanding associated with the Unit.

Centres in the main do understand these requirements and work hard with their candidates to meet them. However, there are still variations between centres in the way in which this understanding is implemented. This has been commented upon in previous reports and particularly applies to the amount, quality and type of performance evidence provided and in the way that candidates demonstrate how they prove that the Management standards are being met. A summary of the key areas identified in this regard is provided below:

- ◆ Sufficiency — candidates must provide sufficient evidence to show that all Performance Criteria are being met. While it must be stressed that the vast majority of centres are vigilant in this regard, this year there have been a few centres where the evidence provided by candidates has been 'thin' and the centres concerned have, perhaps, been generous in their consideration of that evidence. While candidates should continue to submit the smallest possible number of evidence items this must be consistent with the requirement to fully cover all aspects of the standards. This problem has perhaps been more prevalent in the optional Units but nonetheless needs to be guarded against.
- ◆ Attributable/authentic — most, if not all centres, have in place mechanisms, eg candidate declarations, to ensure that the evidence provided can be directly attributed to the candidate. Indeed, assessment approaches such as professional discussion, witness testimony and observation help to ensure that the work is that of the candidate. However, there are still examples of policy documents, blank forms, guidance papers, etc in portfolios which are not attributable to the candidate. These documents are rarely relevant and, as has been stated before, the evidence lies in how candidates use these documents and how that evidence supports candidate claims for competency.
- ◆ Signposting — it is important that all evidence provided is clearly mapped to the standards for which competency is being claimed. A cross-referenced matrix on its own is not sufficient and there should be an explicit link to the standards in an appropriate form, eg annotation, personal statement or reflective account (see later). As centres and their candidates continue to

develop holistic and more innovative ways of collecting evidence it is even more important for verifiers to be able to easily follow these links.

- ◆ Reflective accounts/personal statements — the use of these documents as a means of supporting or linking candidate evidence has been touched on in previous reports. However, there appears to be continuing uncertainty and in response to queries from a number of centres it was felt necessary to issue a statement to clarify the position. The statement was issued in June 2014 and is reproduced below:

'A number of centres queried the use of Reflective Accounts / Personal Statements as evidence towards Performance Criteria (PCs). While it can be argued that there are differences between the two, they are treated here as one and the same.'

According to the Assessment Guidelines for SVQs in Management:

Candidates can produce personal statements that are written in the first person and describe their actions in completing a task. The candidate is expected to indicate the Outcomes of effective performance, behaviours (note 1) and knowledge and understanding which are demonstrated in the practice. The personal statement should always explicitly focus on the candidate's real work and not on what might be done.

The Assessment Guidelines also state that:

A Personal Statement may accompany the evidence for each Unit. The Evidence Requirements identify certain Outcomes where this is more likely to be of value. A Personal Statement is not real work evidence, but it can be useful in explaining and reflecting on behaviour in achieving certain Outcomes and why candidates behaved as they did, thus helping to link evidence of Outcomes to Behaviours (note 1) and Knowledge and Understanding.'

Note 1: As outlined at SVQ Management event in May 2014, there is now no need to assess behaviours.'

- ◆ Knowledge and understanding — on the whole the knowledge and understanding element is well managed by centres. However, it continues to be an issue for some centres in terms of the level and how evidence may be gathered and presented. In some cases, the evidence to support knowledge and understanding needed to be stronger and needed to reflect the appropriate level, ie 3, 4, or 5. Ideally, knowledge and understanding will be present in the performance evidence but that is not always possible and the candidate must provide evidence in some other way, eg annotation, personal statement, professional discussion, reflective account, questioning. The depth will vary depending on the evidence and on the level; a level 5 candidate is more likely to provide a greater amount of reflection than a level 3. As before, the evidence must be clearly mapped to the standards.

Overall, external verification during 2013–14 has shown that centres continue to improve practice and there are some excellent examples of good practice. The majority of centres use a range of assessment approaches which in turn helps and supports candidates in meeting the evidence requirements.

Administration of assessments

External verification during 2013–14 confirmed that, in general, the SVQ Management awards at all levels continue to be assessed appropriately. Reports regularly refer to the good quality of candidates' work and the commitment, enthusiasm and motivation of centre staff. In addition, candidate interviews often refer to how centres work with them to help them find ways of collecting evidence appropriate to their work situation.

As reported previously, most centres have developed robust systems to ensure that candidates are assessed appropriately and are at the appropriate level. These systems in the main start with clear recruitment and selection processes with the majority of centres using a diagnostic tool and an interview process to ensure that candidates are at the appropriate level for the award being undertaken. These are further supported, in most centres, by clear targeted assessment plans that provide a structured approach which enables candidates to own and track their progress through the awards. The use of contact diaries or, log in these centres provides excellent evidence of how candidates and the assessment process are supported.

The use of e-portfolio models continues to grow. While established e-portfolio models, eg Learning Assistant and Proof Positive (designed for NVQ/SVQ use) are being used, there are a number of new experimental approaches beginning to emerge, eg Microsoft OneNote. The use of video and digital recording is increasing, eg one centre voice records the candidate evidence support statements that make the link between the evidence and the standards. These approaches throw up new challenges and new opportunities and as long as the evidence meets the standards and can be tracked and verified are to be welcomed.

The majority of centres have developed comprehensive systems and documentation which supports the delivery, assessment and verification processes for the awards. These include and are not confined to:

- ◆ Standardised layout for portfolios (NB a number of centres are working with two formats, one electronic and one manual to reflect the needs and preferences of different candidates)
- ◆ Standardised templates for evidence gathering, eg observation reports, reflective accounts/personal statements/storyboards, witness testimony reports and evidence recording
- ◆ Assessor/verifier documentation, eg assessment plans, action plans, assessor feedback and IV feedback forms, tracking forms and sampling documentation

- ◆ Assessment and IV procedures which include clear roles and responsibilities, action logs, IV feedback arrangements, standardisation arrangements and meetings
- ◆ Support materials for candidates such as portfolio building guidance, induction materials and packs, knowledge-based materials, eg websites and information packs which supplement the SQA candidate packs
- ◆ Monitoring systems which allow the tracking of candidate progress and the work of assessors and internal verifiers supported by good CPD provision

Discussion with candidates highlight the high level of support provided to candidates tailored to their needs in order to achieve the award being undertaken. Strong support is particularly evident where there are well structured assessment plans with clear targets and good supporting feedback. Over the last few years the level of feedback from assessors to candidates has improved and this last year has seen centres working hard to capture all of the feedback, including informal discussions/emails/telephone calls, given to candidates. These contact diaries/logs all help to structure the candidate experience and help to ensure that candidates are sure as to what is expected of them.

Internal verification systems in the main are strong and work well across centres. Internal verifiers are generally clear about their role and responsibilities and many play a key role, as they should, in improving assessment practice. The feedback provided by the IV to the assessor is critical in this regard and should reflect, eg development points from EV visits, action points from standardisation meetings, and good assessment practice. Rarely is an unaccompanied signature or a brief statement of 'agreed' sufficient.

General feedback

Feedback to candidates

As noted earlier, the majority of centres have good systems that encourage and record formal and informal feedback and discussions with candidates, eg assessment plans, diary systems, logs and contact diaries. The majority of the e-portfolio models being used have a contact diary provision within the system and generally assessors do use these. Overall, feedback is detailed and supportive which allows candidates to take responsibility for their work and their progress.

Feedback from candidates

One of the enjoyable aspects of any visit is having the opportunity to speak to candidates. Once again, the feedback received is almost always very positive and complimentary. Without prompting, candidates often refer to the helpfulness of their assessor and centre staff, the ease of contact, promptness in dealing with queries, and to a generally supportive climate. This continues to be great tribute to the dedication of those involved with the award.

In addition, candidates find the SVQ Management useful, fitting in with their work and career development plans and many comment as to how it has 'opened doors' for them. Candidates frequently comment, for example, that they feel more

confident, they feel they now have the vocabulary required when discussing things with other managers and they have a greater understanding of their role. Many refer to specific improvements that they have made, eg organisation of their work and that of others, and how they communicate and engage with their team.

Matching occupational role of candidates with SVQ Management

For some centres this continues to be a potential problem and as such it is appropriate to cover this again. The SVQ Management is specifically targeted at those who are currently working in a managerial post and is not appropriate for those who aspire to such posts but have not yet achieved them, even if they are highly likely to do so. A further aspect is that it is the level of management responsibility that determines the level of the award and not the candidate's previous level of achievement or their perception of their status.

Candidates who may feel that Level 5 would be good for them may not be in a position which has the level of management responsibility across their organisation that this level requires. In some cases it may be that candidates while unable to demonstrate competence across all the Units in an award may be able to demonstrate competence in one of the areas covered by the PDAs and achieve the PDA. As before, if a candidate has achieved at one level, eg SVQ Level 4, it is unlikely they can undertake the next level, eg SVQ Level 5, unless their job role has changed which would then allow the candidate to demonstrate competence at the new level.

Continuous improvement by centres

It is encouraging to see many centres continuing to refine, rework and continually improve their approach to the SVQ Management. One of the key drivers here is technology, the use of e-portfolios is growing but other developments include the development of online support materials, the use of social media, candidate tracking systems and online documentation. Alongside these developments is a continued improvement in the support and feedback given to candidates which is reflected in the highly positive experiences being reported by candidates. The opportunity for candidates to join the Chartered Management Institute (CMI) for free for 12 months is giving access to a large bank of resources. Student membership enables access to a range of management information, management tools and support, to help candidates to achieve their award and perform more effectively and efficiently within their roles. Centres can also gain institutional membership giving them access to resources, which allows assessors to target the use of resources. Despite the opportunities presented uptake remains low.

Areas of good practice

As can be seen from the above there are many aspects of good practice that were apparent during external verification visits in 2013–14 many of which continue from previous years. This confirms the high level of commitment shown by centres and their staff and their desire to continually improve their offer. This is

good practice in itself and can be seen as one of the most significant aspects of the assessment and verification of the SVQ Management.

The following points, which have been grouped together for convenience summarise some of the main aspects of good practice. There is some repetition here of points made earlier and in previous reports.

Portfolio development

- ◆ Candidate support and direction in building portfolios allowing them to take early ownership
- ◆ Contact diaries and/or logs to record fully the support and direction given to candidates
- ◆ Candidates explicitly linking evidence to the standards
- ◆ Wide range of performance evidence
- ◆ Ensuring knowledge requirements and encouraging candidates to link these to their work situation
- ◆ Managed flexibility in portfolio structures, eg traditional and e-portfolios being available. In one centre one of their candidate portfolios, due to significant security and organisational requirements, was entirely held in the workplace. The format was electronic but slightly different from the norm. Support was provided by the centre assessor and full access provided to the internal verifier and to the External Verifier which included full access to the candidate, the portfolio and the candidate workplace
- ◆ Transparent portfolios which are easy to follow.

Standardisation/internal verification

- ◆ Use of standardisation meetings to support management CPD for assessors, eg one centre includes a management development topic at every standardisation meeting
- ◆ Strong procedures for standardisation meetings, eg meeting calendars, regular 'in service' days for assessors, detailed minutes and action logs
- ◆ Detailed IV reports which make comments reflecting standardisation meetings, EV visits and/or development points and that also recognise good work. These reports include a mechanism to ensure corrective action is taken before the Units are signed-off
- ◆ Interim and final verification even with experienced assessors — this helps to highlight any issues at an early stage
- ◆ Linking the standardisation and verification process to CPD to ensure that issues identified can be cascaded across the team
- ◆ Using IV reports as part of a continuous improvement process which can lead to the early resolution of issues

Communication with candidates

- ◆ Learning contracts which clearly outline the responsibilities of the candidate, the centre and more often than not the employer

- ◆ Selection and induction programmes that ensure candidates are appropriately levelled and that optional Units chosen reflect the candidate's work situation
- ◆ Good planning documentation that clearly indicates targets for candidates to work to
- ◆ Strong support mechanisms for candidates where issues may arise, eg work, health, etc

Specific areas for improvement

To a considerable extent, specific areas for improvement with respect to SVQ Management depend on what takes place in each individual centre. The action points set out in the EV report for each centre indicate actions that the centres could take to enhance the work they do. Recommendations made in the individual reports may also help to enhance provision in each centre and centres are asked to give full consideration to these.

There are a few issues as indicated earlier and these are noted below. The extent to which these issues apply will vary from centre to centre.

- ◆ Ensuring that there is sufficient evidence to meet the standards
- ◆ Maintaining CPD activity to reflect both development in assessment/verification and in Management
- ◆ Ensuring that the evidence for knowledge requirements reflects the appropriate level
- ◆ Recording discussions/feedback to candidates through diaries/action logs
- ◆ Discouraging candidates from using blank documents or organisational policy/procedure documents unless they have a direct relevance to their claim for competence against the standards
- ◆ Improving IV feedback to ensure that it supports assessors and contributes to improving assessment practice

Overall, most centres have a strong commitment to continuous improvement and this is most encouraging.

Finally, on behalf of the EV team SQA would like to thank all centres for their hard work and contribution. Ensuring that the awards continue to meet the needs of candidates relies on good robust partnerships and the EV team feel that this has been strong over the years and looks forward to this approach continuing in future.