Scottish Vocational Qualifications 2016 Internal Assessment Report

Workplace Core Skills: Communication

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

Workplace-assessed units

F425 04 Workplace Core Skills: Communication (SCQF level 3)
F426 04 Workplace Core Skills: Communication (SCQF level 4)
F427 04 Workplace Core Skills: Communication (SCQF level 5)
F428 04 Workplace Core Skills: Communication (SCQF level 6)

General comments

National standards in Workplace-assessed Communication are, for the most part, consistently and accurately evidenced.

Most centres are well prepared for visiting verification, with all evidence requested in the visit plan easily available. Increasingly, record-keeping systems and portfolios are electronic. Many different electronic portfolio systems are in use. With the assistance of centre staff, external verifiers are usually able to locate required evidence quickly. In some cases, however, it presents a time-consuming and difficult task. Some systems are slow to download evidence, especially where it is in the form of audio or video recording (large files). Where a large amount of evidence is to be sampled, this can present a problem and efficient referencing is essential. Sometimes, extensive evidence is presented but it is not closely matched to the specific skills of the unit.

Electronic portfolios often make use of photographs, film or scanned documents. However, they do not always lend themselves to easy internal or external verification of evidence. Where video clips are used, they should be carefully referenced to avoid time being wasted tracking down the relevant piece of evidence. Where more than one piece of evidence is supplied this can create confusion for the external verifier. Centres are reminded that only one appropriate piece of evidence is required for each task, with the exception of Writing where a portfolio approach is used.

In verification reports, recommendations continued to focus on:

♦ the need for clear referencing where evidence is drawn from across the award
♦ ways of drawing evidence 'naturally occurring' in the vocational award

Course arrangements, unit specifications, instruments of assessment and exemplification materials

Visiting verifiers confirmed that all centres were familiar with current unit specifications and assessment support packs (ASPs). The SQA assessment checklists are usually modified locally to confirm appropriate achievement. It is good to see that stand-alone Communication assessment is now rare.

New assessors are generally well supported and this is clear from detailed CPD records and other tracking documents. Larger centres often hold development sessions in which useful update and standardisation takes place.

The need for more evidence of dedicated Core Skills CPD continues to be flagged by external verifiers. This can be provided by, for example, recording visits to SQA's website to read essential documents, such as internal assessment reports, updates and exemplar material. In some cases, an SQA development visit had proved helpful.

Evidence requirements

Evidence for achievement of the Core Skills should be relevant to the award and wherever possible be drawn from activity completed during the vocational award. In some instances, stand-alone assessment is necessary but this should not be the norm.

When looking for appropriate evidence from across a vocational award, it is useful to bear in mind key words for different levels of Communication achievement.

At level 3, a key word is '*simple*'.
At level 4, tasks, and the language involved, should be '*straightforward*'.
At level 5, a key concept is '*well-structured*'.
At level 6, all tasks will involve '*complex*' material, and for Speaking and Listening, a formal context is expected.

Reading tasks

It is essential to retain texts used to assess Reading and for those texts to be confirmed by the internal verifier as appropriate for use in each case (this constitutes internal validation of the assessment instrument).

The same text must not be used to assess Reading at more than one level. We suggest the Reading text, at each level, should be at least as long as the minimum word count for Writing, plus up to 300 words. So for level 5, for example, the expected length of Reading text might be 500–800 words.

Further details can be found in the units and ASPs, but in brief, the progression is as follows:

◆ Level 3: A piece of *simple* reading material related to the workplace that conveys several pieces of information. The reading material will be brief, its purpose clear, the key points explicit, and the content direct and uncomplicated (see ASP p. 9).

◆ Level 4: *Straightforward* reading material related to the workplace that conveys several sets of information and/or a distinct point of view. The reading material should express its content in a direct, uncomplicated way and key points should be easily identifiable (see ASP p.14).

- Level 5: *Well-structured* reading material related to the workplace: the reading material should present and analyse factual content or present a sustained point of view or central argument (see Unit p. 3).
- Level 6: A *complex* document related to the workplace: the material should include a set of facts and an analysis of them, or a sustained argument. It will be a substantial and detailed text with complex sentences, specialist vocabulary and concepts that may be unfamiliar (see Unit p.3).

Candidate responses to the text must also be retained, either in written form (brief report or notes), or through responses to appropriate questions from the assessor. In the latter case, the assessor must write down or record both questions and responses.

At each level, including level 3, some evaluation is required. Visiting verifiers found that Reading responses at all levels often failed to include sufficient evaluative content. This something centres should review in assessor training and standardisation sessions.

Writing tasks

Writing evidence should include a note of purpose and intended reader, even when it is drawn from vocational activity, since the assessor (and external verifier) has to take these factors into account when assessing achievement.

Evidence for Writing is usually identified from activity in the vocational qualification. Sometimes centres identify too much evidence (eg a portfolio of several pieces amounting to a word count far in excess of what is expected). Equally, the evidence may be duplicated — both a photograph and text copy of the same document. Again this can prove unnecessarily time-consuming for a visiting verifier.

There was some concern this year about the complexity of tasks for Writing. Some centres were using word length as the key criterion of matching to level, rather than confirming that the whole piece of evidence was appropriate to a level.

Task descriptions with full detail can be found in the units and ASPs. Evidence should either be naturally occurring as part of the vocational award, or at least workplace-related. The progression in Writing is briefly as follows:

- Level 3: A document or related documents that conveys several pieces of information, or an opinion or idea *simply*. Structure should be discernible. Spelling, punctuation and sentence structures should be sufficiently accurate to convey meaning.
- Level 4: The Writing task should be familiar for the candidates in their workplace. They will convey several sets of information and/or a clearly stated opinion. They will use *straightforward* vocabulary and sentence structure, including, where appropriate, common specialist or technical terms.

A few errors may be present but these should not prevent the reader from grasping the meaning on first reading.

♦ Level 5: The written evidence will be *well-structured*, with a clearly defined purpose and audience. Information will be presented and analysed, with selection and highlighting of the most significant points. A few errors may be present when using complex grammar or vocabulary but these should not be significant.

♦ Level 6: The written evidence will have a clearly defined purpose, audience, and structure. *Complex* information will be presented, analysed and evaluated, and/or ideas considered in depth and considered from several perspectives, taking account of and refuting challenges. Spelling, punctuation and sentence structure will be consistently accurate.

Speaking tasks

As with Writing tasks, duration of the Speaking and Listening interaction is significant, and length should be recorded to ensure the minimum requirement is satisfied. There should also be a note on context, from which purpose and audience can be inferred.

In some cases, centres had been unsure how to evidence some aspects of Listening where the assessment task was an oral presentation. For example, at level 5, in the assessment checklist given in the ASP, the assessor is required to confirm that the candidate:

♦ picked out the main points the speaker was making
♦ interpreted the way the speaker used their voice and body language to help get their message across

Achievement of these skills can be evidenced from appropriate interaction during the Q&A session at the end of the presentation. Interpretation of the questioner's voice and body language can be inferred from the candidate's own interaction when responding.

The difficulty of the Speaking and Listening task should also progress from one level to the next. An interaction that is appropriate at level 4 will be significantly different from one at level 5, not just shorter, and at level 6, Speaking and Listening tasks will usually take place in a formal context.

Task descriptions with full detail can be found in the units and ASPs. Evidence should either be naturally occurring as part of the vocational award, or at least workplace-related. The progression in Speaking and Listening is briefly as follows:

♦ Level 3: The learner will produce and respond to *simple* oral communication, with some attempt to sequence and link information.
♦ Level 4: The candidate will take part in either a *straightforward* discussion on a work-related topic, or a short presentation on a work-related topic (including

questions). This will involve several pieces of information or ideas, logical linkage, appropriate delivery and interaction.

♦ Level 5: The candidate will make a significant contribution to a discussion on a work-related topic or a presentation on a work-related topic (including questions). It will be accurate and coherent, show skill in sequencing and linking, and take account of situation and audience during delivery.

♦ Level 6: The learner will either make a substantial contribution to a discussion on a *complex*, work-related topic, or give a short presentation on a complex work-related topic, including responses to questions. They will use language consistently and effectively at an appropriate level of *formality*. The communication will be structured to take full account of purpose and audience.

Where evidence for any of the Communication tasks is audio or video recorded, the files should be easy and quick for the internal and external verifier to access. If recordings provide evidence for more than one unit or activity, it should be possible to indicate at what point in the recording the relevant evidence can be found.

Where electronic systems are slow to search, or where downloads are time-consuming to access, material may need to be sourced in advance of visiting verification to facilitate ease of sampling.

Administration of assessments

Internal verification is mainly carried out efficiently and effectively according to SQA requirements.

Some centres have excellent records of internal standardisation, or close interaction between assessors and internal verifiers. Large centres are using modern technology to assist in discussion and sharing decisions or new information with staff across a wide geographical area.

Occasionally, standardisation procedures are poorly documented. It should be noted that SQA requires evidence of internal standardisation practice for visiting verifiers.

Although observation checklists for Speaking and Listening tasks are mainly completed with necessary detail, occasionally they are merely tick-box documents, which is insufficient. In the absence of an audio or video recording of the event, a detailed observation record must be completed. A witness statement is not appropriate evidence: the assessor must be present for the Speaking and Listening event, unless it is video-recorded.

It is, however, rare for visiting verifiers to find recorded examples of Speaking and Listening tasks. We recommend that centres consider recording at least some of these, for purposes of internal verification and standardisation. Alternatively, some events might be co-assessed by more than one assessor, or assessed 'live' during an external verification visit. Materials currently in

development to support Speaking and Listening assessment for the NQ Communication Core Skills units may be of use to workplace assessors also. These will be published later this year.

Occasionally, Workplace Core Skills were being delivered in situations which were more classroom-based than work-based. In such a situation, centres should consider using the NQ units if possible.

In several cases, misunderstanding of MA frameworks, meant that centres were unclear which Core Skills required separate certification and assumed (incorrectly) that they could apply for certification without identifying evidence from the SVQ and matching it appropriately to Core Skills requirements.

Areas of good practice

Good practice included:

♦ action points from internal verifiers clearly communicated, with dated records of actions completed — some internal verifiers also recorded praise, indicating close and supportive working relationships
♦ Core Skills assessment integrated with the main award and drawing on evidence occurring as part of vocational training
♦ detailed records of standardisation meetings
♦ effective data management and centralised records
♦ candidates' development needs (and prior achievement where appropriate) accounted for in training plans and additional support provided where it was needed
♦ planned induction and support for new assessors and verifiers
♦ warm and supportive feedback from assessors to candidates
♦ assessment feedback closely linked to the skills in the specification

Specific areas for improvement

Some areas for improvement were highlighted. These included:

♦ the clear and systematic referencing of evidence (in some cases visiting verifiers had found tracking down the relevant evidence challenging and time-consuming)
♦ the need to retain texts for assessing Reading (if Reading is assessed through oral questions, assessors must record both the questions and the candidate responses)
♦ Reading responses at all levels must demonstrate both the ability to pick out appropriate main points and the skill of evaluation
♦ more learner comment on content, style and format of the Reading material (clearer matching of assessor comment to specific skill would be helpful to confirm the standard had been fully covered)

- texts used for Reading must meet type and complexity requirement for each level (see ASPs for details and page 3 of this document)
- Core-Skills-specific CPD should be recorded by assessors/verifiers (eg reviewing SQA Core Skills policy updates, and reading current IARs)
- evidence of achievement of Reading, or Speaking and Listening, and presented for internal or external verification, should be gathered from a single event