National Units

Qualification Verification Summary Report 2017
Core Skills: Communication

Introduction

The units listed below were verified.

F3GB 09   Communication
F3GB 10   Communication
F3GB 11   Communication
F3GB 12   Communication

Visiting verification was carried out this year in a variety of centres, including several with large assessor teams working across several campuses. Almost all centres were able to supply appropriate evidence for all quality criteria, although some familiar concerns were identified by visiting verifiers. These concerns include availability of marking guides for Reading, and currency of texts; problematic 'correction' of candidates' work in Writing; and unsatisfactory or minimalist feedback on observer/assessment checklists for Speaking and Listening.

Effective standardisation is challenging in large centres. Ideally, visiting verifiers hope to find consistency of standards at the same time as imaginative, meaningful, candidate-centred approaches. Assessors should be confident in contextualising materials and making them meaningful in terms of real candidate needs. It is hoped that new exemplar material for Speaking and Listening, to be hosted securely on the Understanding Standards website, will support centres in standardisation discussion. Two new contextualised assessment support packs are also now available on SQA's secure website. One relates to Travel and Tourism study (at SCQF level 4). The other is relevant to Social Care/Childcare study (SCQF level 5).

Category 2: Resources

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

All centres visited provided evidence of both initial and ongoing reviews of reference, learning and assessment materials. In the larger centres, this was often in the form of a pre-delivery checklist for the relevant units, completed annually. Evidence of reviewing assessment environments and equipment was less readily available. For the Core Skill of Communication, the assessment environment is in most cases a classroom, and the equipment (if applicable) is computers/laptops and/or recording devices. Technical equipment is not normally reviewed by the teaching team but centrally by appropriate departments or committees. In some cases, recommendation was made that the Core Skill master folder include a current policy document, detailing the precise review arrangements for classrooms and technical equipment so that evidence can easily be provided for this criterion.

Category 3: Candidate support

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

In all cases, prior achievement and development needs were appropriately taken into account. Information about prior achievement is usually drawn from either SQA Core Skills Profiles or other SQA records. This is used to confirm the correct entry level. Diagnostic testing may also be used where no previous record is held. Specific development needs are assessed in different ways in different centres. Such needs may be reviewed, for example, at point of application, during induction, as a result of diagnostic testing, self-referral or during the course should difficulty become evident. Where necessary, candidates have a personal support plan and receive help accordingly.

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

Core Skill Communication units are usually delivered in a classroom environment. All centres visited this year had regularly scheduled classes or tutorials, in which both formative practice and summative assessment took place. Evidence of this was provided in the form of teaching and assessment schedules, and access to the assessor or tutor. Adequacy of contact with assessors//tutors was confirmed in interviews with candidates.

Category 4: Internal assessment and verification

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

All centres visited had internal assessment and verification procedures that met SQA requirements and were helpful in achieving effective standardisation. In the larger centres, achieving consistent standards is complex and challenging. Some recommendations were made regarding, for example, centralised record keeping, use of consistent checklists across all campuses, and better communication between teaching teams.

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

Almost all assessment instruments were found to meet SQA requirements. SQA's prior verification service was used in many cases to confirm validity. Use of assessment instruments was mainly accurate and effective, though there were recommendations to review currency, especially with regard to older texts used for the Reading task.

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

All centres visited met SQA's required conditions for assessment and provided appropriate controls to ensure authenticity. Policies were in place to address plagiarism and malpractice. In many cases, candidates were required to sign authenticity statements. The issue of plagiarism

was also often covered during induction, in student handbooks, and in early sessions of teaching. Some centres had access to plagiarism software. However, specific recommendation was made that assessors retain at least one draft of written work for Task 2 (Writing), especially where the final document was word processed, to support authenticity.

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

There was sufficient evidence in almost all centres that candidates' work was being accurately judged by assessors. Consistency was sometimes an issue where assessment checklists were completed with minimal detail, and this was noted as a particular issue for Speaking and Listening tasks. Marking guides for the Reading task were mainly easily available and well prepared. In a few cases, the evaluation aspect of the Reading task was not well covered in candidate responses.

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

All centres visited were fully compliant with SQA requirements for retention of evidence.

Criterion 4.9: Feedback from qualification verifiers must be disseminated to staff and used to inform assessment practice.

All centres visited were able to confirm that the feedback from visiting verifiers would be shared with relevant staff and used in future planning and development. Some centres had a clear policy to this effect, and this was helpful. Other centres provided evidence of relevant practice in the form of minutes of meetings, actions taken in response to recommendations etc. Some centres retained all reports of visiting verifiers in the master folder or central electronic file.

Areas of good practice reported by qualification verifiers

The following good practice was reported during session 2016–17:

♦ Online systems are being used to good effect to support standardisation and information flow across large centres with several campuses.
♦ There were numerous instances of a firmly candidate-centred approach, in terms of materials used and assessment planning.
♦ Some candidates had been encouraged to use anti-plagiarism software to check their own written work.
♦ There were instances of good use of the annual qualification verification summary report (QVSR), previously known as internal assessment report, to pick up key messages from SQA and plan strategic actions.
♦ Some day-to-day decision-making was recorded in a log, available to all assessors. This is especially useful in large centres where face-to-face meetings of all assessors are hard to arrange.
♦ There was widespread evidence of relevant, contextualised learning and assessment tasks.

- Detailed, supportive, individualised and encouraging assessment feedback was often found and praised.
- Video or audio recording of Speaking and Listening tasks had, in some cases, contributed towards standardisation and internal verification.
- There was evidence that some previous visiting verification reports had been fully disseminated, discussed, and used to inform assessment planning and practice.

Specific areas for development

The following areas for development were reported during session 2016–17:

- Centres should consider how they can best provide evidence for visiting verifiers not only of regular reviews of learning and assessment material, but also reviews of accommodation and equipment.
- All centres, but especially those with several campuses, should pursue a strong administrative system that reinforces consistency of documentation and methodology.
- Good communication between assessors and internal verifiers is essential. Where there is a large team, with assessors based in several locations, ways of making interaction practicable and supportive, possibly through innovative methods, should be pursued.
- In Reading assessments, candidates should be reminded that any summary answers should be (as far as possible) in their own words. Marking guides for Reading should explain the base-line response necessary to demonstrate understanding through summary, as well as what would constitute appropriate reference to 'supporting detail' at SCQF levels 5 and 6. ('Supporting detail' will usually be such aspects as graphics/pictures, anecdotes, case studies, pull-out quotes, examples.)
- Currency may be an issue, not just in terms of Reading texts, but also in bringing language up to date — references to learning outcomes, or outcomes, or performance criteria are not appropriate to Core Skills units, which are based on tasks, general and specific skills, and evidence requirements.
- For Writing tasks, it is essential that purpose and readership are clear. One earlier draft (or planning notes) should be retained as well as the final piece. A candidate signature may also be useful. Direct correction of Writing tasks is not permissible, though candidates may be advised where redrafting is necessary.
- If the main evidence of Speaking and Listening achievement is an observation/assessment checklist, commentary on that document must be detailed. Assessors are strongly encouraged to retain additional evidence in the form of planning notes, cue cards etc. Duration of Speaking and Listening performance should always be recorded.