**Scottish Vocational Qualifications**

# Qualification Verification Summary Report 2017

# Core Skills: Communication

# Introduction

The units listed below were verified.

| | |
|---|---|
| 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) |

Most centres visited in this session were able to supply appropriate evidence for all quality criteria, although concerns identified by visiting verifiers were similar to those identified in the internal assessment report for 2016. These concerns include centres not retaining Reading texts as part of candidate evidence, inconsistent evidence of candidate Reading achievement, and assessors not gathering candidate evidence for Tasks 1 and 3 from a single assessment event. Assessors and internal verifiers are well qualified and keep good continuing professional development (CPD) records, though evidence of more Core-Skill-specific CPD would be welcomed.

Often centres claim the Core Skills Communication unit by exception, depending on the award, since many candidates possess the necessary level of achievement before training begins. This makes candidate numbers small. Identifying relevant tasks from the vocational portfolio can be highly individualised, making consistency and standardisation challenging.

Most centres use assessment checklists drawn from the SQA assessment support packs to confirm that performance meets the requirements of the specification. These checklists can accommodate detailed candidate feedback, which constitutes good practice.

# Category 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.**

All centres provided evidence that staff were competent in assessing and/or internally verifying. Most had extensive relevant experience and all were either qualified or working towards an appropriate qualification. More evidence of Core-Skill-specific CPD would have been welcomed, for example evidence of reading and reviewing changes to the SCQF level 5 assessment support pack, or noting the development points on the internal assessment report for 2016.

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

There was good evidence of initial reviews of all aspects at the approval stage. Ongoing reviews of assessment environments may be carried out by employers or relevant agencies as part of their own legal requirements, so are not always the centre's responsibility. It was confirmed in all cases that ongoing reviews of reference, learning and assessment materials were carried out by centres, with evidence in the form of minutes of review meetings, logs or diaries. In colleges, pre-delivery checklists provided routine evidence of an annual review of Core Skills units.

# 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 before training commenced. Evidence of this was provided in course access requirements, training plans, induction materials and, in some cases, in personal support plans.

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

All contact with assessors was regularly scheduled. Evidence of this was found in training plans, with action points noted and, in some cases, in assessment schedules. There was some evidence of social media being used effectively by candidates to communicate with assessors.

# 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 policies that met SQA requirements on paper, but in a few cases policy and practice were at odds, and internal verifiers had failed to note where assessment tasks were inappropriate or were methodology was flawed. This quality criterion has a close connection with 4.3. and 4.6. below, and if action is required it may affect all three criteria.

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

Almost all centres were using the SQA assessment support packs to inform practice, and the assessment checklists from these packs were useful in confirming that evidence was appropriate. In a few cases, activities used to generate assessment evidence were not clearly referenced or it was found that achievement had been confirmed by accumulating evidence of different aspects of achievement from different events: this is not a valid assessment method for the Workplace Core Skills: Communication units.

Achievement for Task 1 of Workplace Core Skills: Communication must be drawn from a single event, and this is also the case for Task 3. Evidence for Task 2 (Writing) and Task 3 (Speaking and Listening) can often be easily integrated with other vocational assessments. Task 1 (Reading) is unlikely to be fully integrated and it was sometimes noted by visiting verifiers that inappropriate texts had been used for the Reading task, or that Reading responses had failed to provide adequate evidence of evaluation.

Some assessors were assessing Reading inappropriately: they had noted that documents at the right level had been read, but had not recorded candidate responses to those texts. This led to discussion about methods of assessing the Reading task and where guidance might be found on this. The SQA assessment support packs for SCQF level 5 and SCQF level 6 state 'Answer

the questions in Task 1 of the unit'. However, the unit specifications do not offer a straightforward set of questions that covers all evidence requirements, though they do indicate prompts that may be used to elicit appropriate evaluation. It is up to the assessor to devise (and retain) a set of questions appropriate to level and also to retain the candidate responses to those questions, either in writing or audio recording. (An example of a set of SCQF level 6 questions is given at the end of this report.)

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

All centres visited had met SQA's required conditions for assessment and provided appropriate controls to ensure authenticity. The issue of plagiarism was often addressed while drawing up training plans as well as in induction packs. In most cases assessors were working closely with candidates and regularly reviewing work, so a breach of authenticity was unlikely. Where candidates were using electronic portfolios and uploading mainly word processed documents, they were required to confirm formally that the work was their own.

### 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. In a few cases, the evaluation aspect of a Reading task was not appropriately covered in candidate responses and/or Reading texts had not been presented for internal or external verification.

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

Almost all centres notified of visiting verification were aware of the necessity to retain all relevant candidate evidence from the point of first contact by the qualification verifier up to and including the date of the visit. This is in addition to the requirement to retain candidate evidence for at least three weeks after the unit has been completed.

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

All centres visited confirmed that feedback from visiting verifiers would be shared with relevant staff and used in future planning and development. In some cases, it was possible to see that previous action points or recommendations had already been successfully addressed. Most centres retained copies of previous verification reports in master files or folders that were accessible to all assessors.

## Areas of good practice reported by qualification verifiers

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

♦ Regular completion of CPD records, with relevant CPD seen as high priority; detailed CPD activity logs; upskilling of old assessor and internal verifier qualifications.

♦ Detailed induction booklets that include information about Core Skills and how they fit into the vocational award.

♦ Additional, individualised support in place from assessors where candidates lack confidence, especially in communication skills.

♦ Positive and encouraging feedback to candidates from assessors.

♦ Good use of social media as an alternative communication medium between assessors and candidates.

♦ Supportive working relationships between assessors and internal verifiers, enabling continuing quality improvement.

♦ Voice recordings retained as additional evidence for the Speaking and Listening task.

♦ Candidates encouraged to comment on their assessment feedback and develop self-reflective learning.

♦ Close interaction between assessors with cross-checking from one assessor to another where there is any reason for doubt.


## Specific areas for development

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

♦ Core-Skill-specific CPD should include reviewing the annual qualification verification summary reports (formally internal assessment reports) and reading relevant Workplace Core Skills documents on SQA's website. This should be recorded in the CPD record for each Core Skills assessor.

♦ Regular reviews should be held to ensure appropriate tasks from the vocational portfolio are being consistently used to generate evidence of Core Skills: Communication achievement. An internal verifier should confirm formally that such tasks are matched closely with the evidence requirements as listed in the assessment checklists found in the SQA assessment support packs. These processes will support quality criteria 2.4, 4.2, 4.3. and 4.6.

♦ Wherever possible, evidence of achievement for Writing and Speaking and Listening tasks should be drawn from work-based activity. A standalone assessment may sometimes be necessary for the Reading task.

♦ Evidence of achievement for Reading and for Speaking and Listening must be drawn from a single event.

♦ If a portfolio of documents is used for the Writing task, one of the pieces must be substantive. Each document must comply with the accuracy description for the relevant level. Purpose and intended reader must be clear in each document, or in accompanying notes.

- Where written evidence is word processed, it is recommended that the centre retain one draft as well as the final product to support authenticity.
- Assessment checklists should be used not only to reference evidence in the portfolio but also to include some comment on how well performance aspects have been exemplified. Assessors should supply sufficient commentary to allow an internal or external verifier to see how the evidence matches performance requirements.
- Standardisation between assessors, and training of new assessors, can be supported by the retention of candidate evidence that exemplifies both borderline and superior achievement.
- Assessors should pay particular attention to the evaluation element in Reading tasks to ensure that candidates back up their reasoning with evidence.
- Texts used to assess Reading must meet the type and complexity requirement for the SCQF level (see assessment support packs for details) and this should be checked and confirmed through internal verification. These texts must be retained as a necessary part of the candidate evidence, and presented with candidate responses for internal verification and external verification.
- Reading texts should be current and relevant and, where possible, drawn directly from the workplace.
- In the event of visiting verification, all relevant candidate evidence must be retained from the point of first contact by the qualification verifier up to and including the date of the visit.

## Reading at SCQF levels 5 and 6

A set of appropriate questions may be used to assess Reading responses. Similar questions may be used for SCQF levels 5 and 6, but the Reading text will be more demanding at SCQF level 6 than 5, and the level of detail expected in responses will be correspondingly more detailed.

At SCQF level 5, candidates have to read, understand, and evaluate a document related to their work that combines factual content *with analysis,* or that presents a sustained point of view. It may sometimes feature unfamiliar, abstract ideas and complexity in tone, point of view, or central argument. The reading material may have more than one purpose. The topic should be one that candidates may encounter through their workplace experiences. The length of the text is likely to be between 500 and 1,000 words, and this could be a section from a longer document.

At SCQF level 6 candidates have to read, understand, and evaluate a complex document related to their work. The document must contain either a set of facts *and an analysis* of them, or a sustained argument. It must be a substantial and detailed text with complex sentences, specialist words, and concepts that may be unfamiliar. It is likely to have more than one purpose. Length is likely to be between 700 and 1,500 words, and this could be a section from a longer document.

**Suggested assessment questions for SCQF level 5 and 6 Reading task**

1. What do you see as the purpose(s) of this document?
2. Could you summarise the key points in your own words, and explain how any important supporting detail underpins these points?
3. Please evaluate the success of the document in terms of its purpose and intended reader(s). You should go into some detail, and comment fully on format, content, and the appropriateness of style/language to the intended reader(s). Back up your points with specific reference to the text.

Further notes on approaches at each level can be found in the internal assessment report for 2016.