



Scottish Vocational Qualifications

Qualification Verification Summary Report 2017

Financial Services

Introduction

The take up of SVQ awards in the Financial Services verification group continues to show strong growth with most of the large providers of financial products and services to customers in the UK using SVQ awards as part of their staff development programmes. In addition, the Diploma in Management Consulting practice is seeing an increase in candidates from the major consulting practices. All the centres visited were assessing/verifying higher numbers of candidates than in previous years and one centre was delivering the awards for the first time.

This report is based on visits that were made to five centres who are delivering the following awards:

Providing Financial Services SVQ Level 2	GH5R 22
Providing Financial Services SVQ Level 3	GH5T 23
Diploma in Management Consulting Practice	GJ10 48

All the candidates were based in Scotland, while the assessors/internal verifiers were located UK wide.

All the assessment activities reviewed were completed using the Employer Equivalent Training Model as defined in Assessment Strategy for Financial Services Partnership awards. All the centres have established very effective relationships with employers over a number of years and this has enabled the assessors and verifiers to adapt to the constant changes in the sector with relative ease.

There is an extremely good understanding of the requirements of the national standards in relation to the financial services-related VQs. The high standards seen in previous years have been maintained with all the verification visits resulting in the outcome rating of “Significant Strengths” for the centre.

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.

Having current financial services knowledge is essential to ensure that valid assessment/verification decisions are made. The requirement to develop and maintain occupational competence is very well understood in the financial services sector and, as a result, all the assessors and verifiers are diligent at ensuring that they complete regular activities to keep up to date with the ever-changing range of regulations, products and services that are being applied. It was good to note that there had been an improvement in the completion and recording of development activities by many of the assessors/verifiers but there is still scope for further improvement.

Both formal learning and learning during team meetings is always completed and recorded but some assessors/verifiers are still not giving enough attention to completing and documenting their informal learning. An example might be the learning they complete when they are at employer sites and they learn about changes to work tasks completed by the candidates and the background reasons for these changes (regulations, products etc).

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

Assessments are completed at the employer sites, and all centres had completed relevant reviews of the environment, procedures and equipment in association with the employers. All the centres provided high quality learning resources to the candidates to supplement their employer's core learning materials. Many centres conduct a formal review of all materials with the employers at a set point in the year, while others adapt and adjust materials on an ongoing basis to address any workplace changes. Either method is appropriate; whichever is used it is important that centres fully document the activity and continue to try and maximise the opportunities to review and reuse evidence that can be generated from other learning materials used by the employers, such as the outputs from organisational audits and e-learning assessments.

Category 3: Candidate support

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

All the centres conduct comprehensive audits of skills and prior achievements as part of their recruitment and/or induction processes. For the awards verified this year, all the candidates were additionally completing Core Skills awards and in many centres these were being scheduled so that the candidates could maximise the consolidation of newly developed skills in the completion of their vocational qualification. This is good practice.

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

By the very nature of the Employer Equivalent Training Model and the arrangements that have to be made to access assessment sites, all face-to-face contact between the candidates and the assessors is scheduled. Because candidate contact time can be difficult to arrange, all the centres have appropriate processes in place to ensure that this contact is regular and that each assessment visit includes appropriate planning for the next visit. In a few instances, less experienced assessors were accepting too many requests from candidates for deferrals of visits due to work pressures, without challenging the position or escalating it to the employer contact. While the financial services sector is one where there can be unexpected peaks in work demand, assessors should always be proactive in using the intelligence the centre will have gathered in previous years to inform their personal assessment visit planning (e.g. recognising the impact of financial year end or tax year end dates).

All assessors and verifiers have a portfolio of candidates spread around the country and it was good to see that all who were assessing/verifying were making very good use of Skype, e-mail, texting and online portfolio platforms to keep in regular touch with candidates and colleagues. Candidates regularly highlighted how good their assessors were at responding to queries and giving guidance and encouragement in between assessment visits.

Category 4: Internal assessment and verification

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

It was good to see that all the centres are continuing to implement their internal assessment and verification procedures to a high standard. Almost all centres use a risk-based model to determine the level of internal verification completed on an individual assessor's portfolio. The quality of feedback given by internal verifiers to assessors was of a consistently high standard.

As candidate numbers have risen, several centres highlighted that their internal verifiers have come under pressure to cope with the increasing volumes. Internal verifiers are to be commended for rising to this challenge and standards have been maintained, however centres should continue to monitor this position to ensure that internal verifiers have enough time and sufficient occupational competence to continue to maintain these standards in the future.

There were several examples of very good use being made of regular team meetings that included a short standardisation activity as a standing agenda item. These meetings were scheduled up to a year ahead to ensure that diary space was preserved for standardisation activities. Meetings and standardisation activities are now almost exclusively completed by webinar/Skype as assessment teams are based across the UK. Again, as highlighted in previous years, all the centres are using UK-wide communities of practice, which maximises the understanding of standards amongst a wider group of assessors/verifiers using the same National Occupational Standards. Standardisation topics are selected by internal verifiers based on assessor and qualification verification feedback, and a variety of units and assessment situations were covered during standardisation.

In all centres, standardisation was completely embedded in assessment procedures and the regular completion of these activities contributed significantly to the successful qualification verification visits. Centres are encouraged not to reduce this attention when they are under resource pressures.

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

Appropriate assessment instruments and methods were being used in every centre. Assessment is completed by observation (including live call listening), a review of products of work, witness testimony, reflective statements and professional discussions. Centres are making very good use of digital voice recording to overcome the confidentiality issues when assessing in call centres. The quality of the signposting of evidence during voice recording has been further improved in many centres this year.

The exact assessment method used is determined on a unit-by-unit basis and reviewed for each workplace to take account of the different job design used by each employer. All centres are

now paying careful attention to ensuring that the candidates can generate the evidence required for their selected units within their job role, and are making timely adjustments where organisational changes give rise to issues during the completion of the award.

Not all centres were being as flexible in their selection of assessment methods as they could be, and were relying on the methods they currently use without exploring alternative methods when issues arose. Where issues arise with generating appropriate assessment evidence, centres should look for alternative assessment methods before asking the employer to give candidates temporary job changes, or requiring candidates to complete new units. At present this breadth of thinking is not yet seen in every centre.

One centre has developed a very good guide for candidates explaining how to gather evidence and structure reflective statements. It is written taking account of specifics that the centre is aware of at the employer site. It is a good guide because, while it signposts the candidate to organisational websites and systems that might hold appropriate evidence, it also gives the candidate a definitive list of evidence that should be in their portfolio, so the candidate retains ownership of the assessment gathering process.

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

All the centres are taking appropriate measures to ensure that the evidence being presented has been generated by the candidate. Where professional discussions are being used to generate evidence, line managers are being asked to confirm the authenticity of the evidence by witness testimony.

Centres do however need to continue to be careful that all line managers are fully aware of the standards required for the assessment evidence when they give their witness testimony, as this can sometimes differ slightly from the organisational standards for the same work. Good practice was seen in some centres where a refresher session was delivered to line managers as part of the overall cohort induction process. This ensured that line managers were fully aware of their role and the standards being assessed in the VQ.

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

All centres are setting appropriate standards and making accurate and consistent assessment decisions. Assessors typically work in UK-wide teams and share their assessment experiences with their colleagues as a matter of course, which helps to ensure consistency.

All centres use candidate reflective statements as part of assessment evidence. Good practice was seen from some centres where, during the assessment of electronic evidence such as reflective statements and witness testimonies, assessors were attaching feedback on the

evidence using the notes function. Placing this feedback exactly at the point in the assessment where the candidate or line manager discussed something aided the assessment and feedback processes, and also signposted to the internal verifier the rationale for assessment decisions.

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

All centres retain their candidate evidence for a period that exceeds the SQA requirements. Good use is made of e-portfolios and archiving systems to support this evidence retention.

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

As part of their regular meeting process, feedback from qualification verifier visits is disseminated to all assessors, and in all centres there was evidence of discussion and reflection on practices based on the comments in reports. Most centres also documented how the external verification reports were additionally passed up to more senior managers so that they too had an overview of the quality standards being met in their centre. In some centres an annual review was undertaken by senior managers across verification groups and awards, rather than limiting the management review to financial services. This high-level review is good practice as lessons can be learned and shared across a range of subjects, and is something all centres might want to consider.

Only a few centres were taking the opportunity to discuss the lessons they could learn from the annual Internal Assessment Report (now called Qualification Verification Summary Report) in one of their assessor/verifier meetings and this is something that all centres should be doing.

Areas of good practice report by qualification verifiers

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

- ◆ The scheduling of unit completion to allow candidates to maximise the consolidation of their core skills development in the completion of the VQ units.
- ◆ The use of Skype, e-mail, texting and online portfolio platforms to provide constant support to geographically dispersed candidates and assessors.
- ◆ The development of employer-specific guidance for candidates on how to gather evidence and to structure reflective statements.
- ◆ The delivery of a refresher session explaining the unit standards to candidates' line managers.
- ◆ Standardisation activities are completed regularly as part of monthly/quarterly team meetings.
- ◆ Assessors attaching feedback and their assessment decision rationale on candidates' electronic evidence using the notes function in Word/Acrobat.
- ◆ The completion of an annual review involving the centre's senior managers that looks across verification groups and awards to identify high-level lessons and pockets of good practice that are not being applied organisation-wide.

Specific areas for development

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

- ◆ The completion and documentation of informal learning by assessors and internal verifiers.
- ◆ Maximise the opportunities to review and reuse evidence that can be generated from other learning materials used by the employers.
- ◆ Using the intelligence the centre has gathered from previous years to inform assessment visit planning.
- ◆ Keep a careful eye on the number of candidates being supported by one assessor and the number of assessors being supported by one internal verifier.
- ◆ Use the full range of assessment methods when considering how candidates could generate evidence for a unit.
- ◆ Include the dissemination of, and a subsequent discussion about, this Qualification Verification Summary Report as part of the centre processes to inform assessment practice.