National Qualifications Units

Qualification Verification Summary Report 2018

Core Skills: Problem Solving and Working with Others

Introduction

The following NQ Core Skills units were externally verified last year:

F3GD 08   Problem Solving
F3GD 09   Problem Solving
F3GD 10   Problem Solving

F3GE 08   Working with Others
F3GE 09   Working with Others
F3GE 10   Working with Others

NQ Core Skills Problem Solving and Working with Others verification activity revealed 'high confidence' ratings in all centres. All visiting verification reports revealed a high standard in the delivery of NQ Core Skills qualifications. Centres provide a range of learning programmes where Core Skills are considered to be an integral part of the delivery in order to support candidates in their chosen course of study and in their development needs. Centres provide a range of Problem Solving and Working with Others activities to support candidates in their individual and vocational development. There were several examples mentioned in external verifiers' reports that highlighted cases where centres had used a holistic approach:

The centre delivers a variety of National Qualifications such as Core Skills levels 2, 3 and 4. The centre delivers Core Skills with the use of project work such as a Language café. The centre delivers Core Skills by using the assessment support pack and contextualising where possible to suit the needs of their candidates.

Time was spent discussing the programme and the variety of learning needs that the candidates have. The centre staff explained that the induction process is a key element of ascertaining and evaluating any barriers to learning.

The centre has an innovative and flexible programme of work that focuses on the candidates working together as a team to improve their employability and personal development skills.

Centres support the variety of needs of candidates and they work holistically to ensure they achieve their full potential. As stated in one external verification report:

The 10 week programme of work that the centre provides is interactive and enables the candidates to work as a team whilst raising their confidence and self-esteem.

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 provided evidence of robust systems and procedures incorporating systematic initial and ongoing reviews of assessment environments; equipment; and reference, learning and assessment materials. Basic risk assessment procedures were in place to record the testing of equipment, annual checks and 'spot' checks of assessment environments.

Staff understood basic health and safety procedures within centres and their role to comply with systems and procedures especially where this may affect the learning and teaching environment, eg ICT issues, broken equipment, or new equipment requiring PAT testing.

One external verification report covered these areas:

The centre has a designated health and safety officer who is responsible for the initial and on-going reviews of the assessment environment and equipment. This includes weekly health and safety checks of the environment, weekly fire testing, quarterly fire evacuation tests and annual PAT testing. All information is recorded along with the centre risk assessments are retained within the centre main office.

The reference, learning and assessment materials are SQA assessment support packs, which are reviewed annually or if they receive notification of any amendments to the units. Where required these may be enlarged or printed on coloured paper to support the learning needs of candidates.

SQA assessment support materials were well presented, current and valid for use. Internal systems checks had been undertaken to ensure that the unit specification, assessment instruments and candidate checklists were current and safe to use.

All centres were well resourced with a wide range of technology and equipment to support the delivery of Core Skills units, eg computers and/or laptops, iPads, access to Wi-Fi, internet and intranet resources. Learning and teaching materials were part of master packs, which were customised and contextualised to the learning experiences candidates were involved in, for example, personal development programmes or employability training.

In one external verification report a specific recommendation was made that centres consider the use of a *'front cover audit checklist for Core Skills. This would indicate that all learning and assessment materials have been approved for use within the centre on an annual basis and can identify the current version in use.'*

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 centres matched candidate development needs and prior achievements against the requirements of all awards. This was summed up by one verifier who clearly indicated how centres continue to support candidates:

> *Progression routes included looking at the candidate's prior achievement such as any certification achievements to ensure a more structured approach is taken to develop the candidate.*

> *Prior achievements considered "previously gained experiences, knowledge, skills and qualifications" to support candidates to "progress onto the correct level of Core Skills for their needs".*

Centres utilise SQA connect to identify the levels of Core Skills gained.

All centres provided well established pre-entry and induction training to identify individual development needs and to create a learning plan that supports the candidate throughout their learner journey. Learning plans are well designed and structured reviews inform candidate progress and action points that may need to be addressed. Candidate development needs can be wide ranging and complex, for example: literacy and numeracy support; specific learning difficulties; mental health and wellbeing issues; medical conditions; personal and/or welfare issues.

Almost all centres have formal systems in place to assess candidate development needs using online assessment packages, the findings of which can be used to inform the individual learning plan.

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

Systems and procedures within all centres supported structured scheduled contact with assessors and systematic reviews to support candidate progression. Assessment plans were in place and information was being recorded and acted on in line with SQA and other awarding body requirements. Verification reports revealed the true extent of robust systems and procedures:

> *An employability training review is carried out within two weeks of the start date of any candidate. Contractual arrangements for the delivery of the MA provision require the centre to have regular contact with candidates. This means that every candidate is seen within a 28 day period as part of a rolling cycle. Further reviews occur every 2–4 weeks on a regular basis where a progress review sheet is used to record what the candidate has achieved at each stage of the review cycle.*

Candidate reviews and centre documentation provided excellent coverage of the reviewing process and adjustments made to assessment plans, eg timekeeping/attendance, health and safety working practice, appropriate dress code, positive approaches to the learning process, positive attitudes towards colleagues and supervisors, and carrying out basic tasks and following instructions.

Category 4: Internal assessment and verification

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

Internal assessment and verification procedures within all centres was fit for purpose and ensured the standardisation of assessment judgements. NQ Core Skills folio evidence is structured across three phases — the planning stage, carrying out the activity, and the reviewing stage. This structure supports the standardisation process as assessors and internal verifiers can keep track of candidate progress across each stage.

Internal assessment and verification decisions had been carried out prior to external verification sampling. Assessor feedback could provide better information for candidates and the internal verifier on how decisions had been reached. Internal verifiers need to provide constructive feedback to assessors especially where candidate responses can be borderline in relation to meeting the national standard. Remediation can support and enhance the quality of candidate evidence.

Almost all centres implement the SQA three-year cycle model. All centres presented detailed assessment and internal verification systems together with the procedures and documentation used to implement quality assurance arrangements. Qualification verifiers were able to see the cycle of verification activity within a centre.

There was consistent evidence of scheduled standardisation meetings but more than a few centres need to consider the use of decision logs to record decisions made.

One external verifier gave a specific recommendation that the centre should *'adopt the use of a decision log to record the decisions made on a central document rather than having to look at a series of internal verification meeting records'.*

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

SQA assessment exemplars for NQ Core Skills units in Problem Solving and Working with Others were routinely in use in all centres. Assessors and internal verifiers like the layout and the templates are conducive to gathering naturally occurring evidence of Core Skills activities in a variety of contexts, eg business and administration; childcare; retail; hospitality; and employability. The development of Core Skills was also seen in personal development programmes and in literacy and numeracy contexts.

Many centres continue to contextualise assessment support materials to fit into bespoke programme design and delivery. For example, as one external verifier mentioned:

The delivery of NQ Core Skills is well organised and there is good communication between the internal verifier and the assessor delivering the units. Assessment evidence is developed in collaboration with candidates and the tasks they need to achieve.

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

SQA candidate disclaimers were routinely in use within all centres. Centre policies and procedures were in place to ensure candidates understood the importance of ensuring the authenticity of their own work. Centre induction programmes highlighted the individual responsibilities of candidates. Malpractice and plagiarism was explained and candidates clearly understood the importance of abiding by SQA requirements throughout the assessment process. Assessors and internal verifiers had carried out assessments in accordance with the required conditions.

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

Assessors consistently judged candidate evidence against SQA's requirements in all centres. Good practice was summarised in several verification reports:

Candidate folio evidence provided excellent reflection at both levels (SCQF levels 3 and 4) and really detailed the learning process.

Assessor observations were comprehensive and well documented throughout all stages of the activity. Additional observation evidence was provided where a candidate had failed to meet the requirements through initial observations.

A number of recommendations were made by external verifiers for centres to consider:

Assessors should have a clear dialogue to *'support the standardisation of assessor observations and ensure all entries are signed and dated relating to when they occur.'*

'Consider the use of verbal responses (signed and dated) where a candidate is struggling to provide a written response.'

'Consider challenging candidate responses that are a little vague and if necessary support with additional verbal responses.'

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

All centres retain candidate evidence in line with SQA requirements, and longer if necessary. Candidate evidence is retained for longer periods by some centres due to the requirements of

other awarding bodies and/or funding requirements. This can vary from the minimum requirement of three weeks, to three years and beyond.

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

Feedback from qualification verifiers is routinely disseminated to staff within centres by the designated SQA co-ordinator, eg e-mail/ phone calls, communal SharePoint facilities within a centre, standardisation meetings and internal reporting on the outcomes of external verification activities.

External verification reports indicated where centres had acted upon previous non-compliance issues positively and within agreed deadlines.

Centres routinely disseminate reports to staff and these are used to inform assessment practice. Records of standardisation meetings were made available but there was limited use made of decision logs in order to keep track of actions taken. Centres need to consider how the use of decision logs can support the standardisation of assessment judgements.

Areas of good practice reported by qualification verifiers

The following good practice was reported during session 2017–18:

♦ NQ Core Skills activities in Problem Solving and Working with Others revealed a good standard of positive reflective evaluations.
♦ Assessor observations were well documented across all stages of the Core Skills process and additional observations supported remediation opportunities.

Specific areas for development

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

♦ It is recommended that assessment materials should have a 'front cover audit checklist', which indicates that an annual review has taken place of all the learning and assessment materials.
♦ More than a few centres need to make use of a decision log to record standardisation decisions.
♦ Assessors and internal verifiers need to challenge candidate responses that are vague and borderline in meeting the national standard. Greater use should be made of ongoing remediation and support to enhance the quality of candidate responses.
♦ Assessors need to have more of a dialogue to standardise assessor observation and feedback to candidates.