Guide to Assessment

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1 Introduction

This guide is designed to provide support for everyone who is involved in the development and delivery of the assessment of SQA qualifications. It is based around the principles of assessment and covers the full range of SQA qualifications.

The majority of SQA qualifications are unit-based. Each SQA unit is a qualification in its own right but can also be grouped into larger qualifications.

SQA units are assessed internally by centres. Internal assessment means that assessors in our centres are responsible for deciding how learners have performed against the standards for the qualification. Centres do this by using either assessment tasks that they have devised themselves, or assessments that SQA has devised. These internal assessment decisions are externally verified by SQA.

We hope that this guide will help you to develop best practice in the development and conduct of assessment, with a particular focus on unit assessment. We publish guidance material for all our procedures that have a bearing on assessment. This guide has links to the most recent versions of these materials.

1.1 SQA qualifications

National Qualifications

National Units and Awards at SCQF levels 1–7. Scottish Baccalaureate, Interdisciplinary Units, Core Skills Units, Skills for Work courses. National 1 Units, National 2, National 3, National 4 and National 5 Courses. Higher and Advanced Higher Courses.

Higher National Qualifications

Higher National Certificates, Higher National Diplomas.

SQA Advanced Qualifications

Advanced Certificates, Advanced Diplomas — for use outside Scotland.

NCs and NPAs (National Qualification Group Awards)

National Certificates and National Progression Awards.

Vocational Qualifications

Scottish Vocational Qualifications, alternative Competence Based Qualifications, Professional Development Awards.

International awards

International Vocational Awards, English for Speakers of Other Languages.

Awards

Flexible practice-based work qualifications for specific sectors.

Customised Awards

Qualifications that are developed to meet the needs of a particular company or business group.

There are different requirements for each type of qualification. You can find the most up-to-date information on SQA qualifications on the SQA Qualifications page of our website.

1.2 The relationship between different qualifications

It can be difficult sometimes to understand the relationships or differences between the qualifications offered by SQA and other awarding bodies. The leaflet 'Qualifications can cross boundaries' provides information that enables comparability between qualifications across the UK and Ireland, and how those qualifications are organised.

Frameworks have been developed at national and international level to show how qualifications relate in terms of difficulty and size.

The Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework has 12 levels, from basic learning at SCQF level 1 to doctorates at SCQF level 12. All the most commonly used Scottish qualifications have been allocated to levels in the SCQF, showing the level of difficulty, or the demand that they make on the learner. Each qualification also has a credit value, which is expressed in points — one point represents a notional 10 hours of learning.

The SCQF shows how Scottish qualifications compare with each other and the entry points to and exit points from qualifications. The SCQF Ready Reckoner shows where SQA qualification types are in the framework, and helps to make learners' progression and transfer clearer and easier.

The Regulated Qualifications Framework is the single framework for describing all regulated qualifications in England and vocational qualifications in Northern Ireland.

The Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales (CQFW) is a framework for qualifications in Wales.

The Republic of Ireland's National Framework for Qualifications (NFQ) is a system of ten levels, based on standards of knowledge, skill and competence. It aims to simplify the Irish qualifications system, and incorporates awards made for all kinds of learning, to increase understanding among all stakeholders.

The European Qualifications Framework (EQF) aims to relate different countries' national qualifications systems to a common European reference framework.

This should promote workers' and learners' mobility between countries, and facilitate their lifelong learning.

2 Purposes of assessment

Assessment is the process of evaluating an individual's attainment of knowledge, understanding and skills. It has many uses but these can be divided into two major categories: uses for individual learners, and uses for external organisations.

2.1 Uses for learners

Different forms of assessment take place throughout a learner's career. Assessment should always contribute to an individual's learning and progress. There are three main types of assessment that help learning. These are diagnostic, formative and summative.

2.1.1 Diagnostic assessment

An assessment can be used to discover a learner's strengths and weaknesses, to identify a learning programme for them, or to assign them to a specific group. For example, if you enrolled to learn a foreign language in an evening class, you could be asked to complete an online test to establish your proficiency to allow the centre to allocate you to the right class — beginners, intermediate or advanced. This use of assessment is called 'diagnostic', and aids individual progress by identifying an appropriate learning path.

2.1.2 Formative assessment

While diagnostic assessment may be used at the beginning of a learning process, formative assessment takes place in the learning environment to provide information on a learner's progress. This information is used to contribute to individual learning by reinforcing and complementing that learning. Formative assessment is not recorded by SQA because it is an integral part of the learning process, but the results of formative assessment should be used to set learning goals and to provide constructive feedback.

It is important to give feedback at an appropriate time and place and in a constructive and encouraging way. The correct use of feedback motivates learners and encourages reflective and independent learning. One of the most effective feedback strategies is *process-orientated praise*, in which feedback focuses on the effort and strategies that a learner has used. This can help learners to take on challenges and to learn from any setback.

2.1.3 Summative assessment

Summative assessment is also known as assessment of learning. It uses learner evidence to form an overall judgement, for example to award formal qualifications when individual learning is assessed against a particular specification or standard. All SQA assessment is summative because it assesses performance against national standards. Summative assessment usually occurs at the end of a sequence of learning but may take place at different points of the learning process. Learners must be informed that their assessment results will be recorded and quality assured.

SQA assessment covers a wide range of assessment methods in unit assessments for school, college and workplace qualifications.

Qualifications provide evidence that an individual has met nationally and internationally recognised standards. The attainment of qualifications can allow individuals to gain entry to further and higher learning, to assist them to gain employment, to progress in the workplace and to be lifelong learners.

2.2 Uses for organisations

2.2.1 Centre

A learner's centre will be involved in all aspects of their assessment — diagnostic, formative and summative. It uses this information to check on and assist individual progress, and so the focus is primarily on the individual learner. Centres may also report back to SQA information generated from any internal assessment activity.

2.2.2 Qualification results

External organisations focus on qualification results, either as a measure of individual attainment or to evaluate the performance levels of the wider system. At the individual level, this focus is generally part of a selection process carried out by further or higher education institutions or by employers.

2.2.3 Quality indicators

In terms of the wider system, qualifications are widely used as quality indicators. Success rates in SQA qualifications are used by the Scottish Funding Council, Skills Development Scotland and sector skills councils to assess the quality of individual centres. Local authorities, Education Scotland and the Scottish Government also use qualification data as one of the indicators by which they evaluate success at local and national level.

2.2.4 Employers

Employers use qualifications to identify individual attainment and to fill skills gaps. Qualifications are also used to respond to localised employment needs. Employers can therefore make a valuable contribution to the design of qualifications and may also be involved in assessment.

2.3 Standards

SQA must ensure that its qualifications provide nationally and internationally recognised standards of attainment.

As well as assessment specifications for all qualifications, we have a range of processes to carry out this vital function, including:

- external verification of internally-assessed units
- monitoring of qualifications across centres

Our Understanding Standards website gives you an opportunity to understand the standards of assessment as they are applied by SQA in a range of qualification types and subjects — including Higher National Qualifications and Scottish Vocational Qualifications. You are given the opportunity to mark anonymised exemplars of real learner responses and compare your marks with those given by the examiners.

SQA Academy has been developed to extend and enhance the training and development opportunities available to all who contribute to SQA assessment. The website is divided into a number of distinct sub-sites. The majority of these are only available to registered users, but registration is easy and clear instructions are provided.

We also offer Professional Development Awards in assessment. Information on these qualifications is available in the Education, Learning, Training and HR area of our website.

3 Assessment for SQA qualifications

Assessment for SQA qualifications involves generating and collecting evidence of a learner's attainment of knowledge, understanding and skills and judging that evidence against defined standards.

There are three essential forms of assessment: observation, product evaluation, questioning. Assessment can also use a combination of some or all of the three forms. All assessment methods, such as a project or performance can be classified under one or more of these forms. This is shown in the grid on page 18, which categorises assessments used by SQA.

3.1 Assessment by observation

The assessor observes the learners as they carry out tasks defined in the standards for the qualification. This observation often takes place in the workplace, or the conditions of the workplace, but it can also be carried out in a laboratory, workshop, theatre, kitchen, dance studio, music room or any other place where the learner is undertaking practical activities.

Assessors need to plan observation to take advantage of any skills or activities that occur naturally in the learning environment, and to make the best use of the available resources. In some circumstances, technology can be used to support observation of practical activities, allowing assessors to judge evidence from a distance, or at a later stage. Digital photographs and audio/visual recording or conferencing can all be useful in these circumstances.

3.2 Assessment by product evaluation

In some areas, as learners work towards achieving their qualifications they will generate evidence in the form of products.

This is the case in vocational and work-based qualifications, as well as practical qualifications. The range of evidence that can count as a 'product' is very wide — for example, a design assignment, multi-media evidence, or a reflective report supported by folio evidence from workplace experience are all forms in which assessment is carried out by evaluation of a completed product. Creative areas, such as craft, art and design will also produce tangible artefacts.

3.3 Assessment by questioning

Questioning is used to assess knowledge and understanding and its various different applications, such as reasoning, planning, analysing and evaluating. Questions may be oral or written.

Oral questions are generally used to:

- confirm knowledge and understanding where it is not apparent from performance-based assessments
- address gaps in knowledge and understanding in performance-based units
- authenticate evidence by asking learners to explain part of the evidence and/or describe the process of producing it

They may also be used as an alternative to written questions.

A wide range of types of written question are used to assess cognitive ability. They may be grouped into the form of tests or question papers, such as those used in some Higher National Graded Units or may be used to set individual tasks such as an investigation, case study, project or dissertation.

If using written questions, you should always ensure that the appropriate reading level is used. Tools to determine the reading level of a document are available in most word-processing software.

4 SQA principles of assessment

SQA must ensure that its qualifications are credible with users, partner organisations and the wider community, and that they provide nationally and internationally recognised standards of attainment. This means that all assessment methods must meet our principles of assessment. All SQA assessments must be:

- valid
- reliable
- practicable
- equitable and fair

This guide is structured around these principles and shows how they can be applied to ensure that your assessments meet SQA's principles of assessment and meet national standards. The sections that follow focus mainly on validity and reliability, but you will see that the principles of equity, fairness and practicability are also addressed because they underpin all assessment issues.

Digital assessment is becoming more common, but the same SQA principles of assessment apply to online assessments.

4.1 How do I develop a valid assessment?

Validity is a measure of the accuracy of an assessment. An assessment is valid when it:

- is appropriate for its purpose
- has been designed to allow learners to show that they have the required knowledge, understanding and skills to meet the standards of the qualification
- allows all assessors to make reliable assessment decisions
- allows the interpretation and inferences which can be drawn from the assessment outcomes to be meaningful and justifiable

Validity has to be ensured at each stage of the assessment process. There are two key aspects of validity used by SQA — **content** and **construct**.

Content validity is the measure of how closely the content of an assessment matches the content of the unit specification published by SQA. It is concerned with the level of knowledge, understanding and skills that is required to meet the standard of the qualification.

Construct validity concerns the extent to which an assessment actually measures what the unit specification states it is intended to measure. For example, an assessment that asked a learner to write about a skill rather than demonstrate it would have low construct validity.

Both types of validity are achieved by subject experts choosing appropriate assessment methods, developing the assessment, and evaluating it against the unit specification.

Following the steps in the next section will help you to ensure that each assessment is appropriate for its purpose and has high content and construct validity.

5 Ensuring validity: the key steps

The key steps in ensuring validity are:

1 Be clear on the specific requirements of the units
2 Create an assessment plan
3 Consider the learner
4 Choose assessment methods
5 Develop the assessment
6 Define evidence for the assessment

5.1 Requirements of unit content and standards

You should take time to familiarise yourself with the units and their specific requirements. This allows you to identify the knowledge, understanding and skills which are to be assessed. An important element of a valid assessment is to know what is required by the national standards in the unit specification.

5.2 Create an assessment plan

As assessment is the process of evaluating an individual's learning, you should always consider the role of the assessment in a programme of learning.

It is good practice to draw up an assessment plan that aligns the unit outcomes with the learning process and the acquisition of knowledge and skills, and indicates how and when the unit will be assessed. In a course or programme of learning consisting of a number of units, it is likely that a range of assessment methods will be used.

The full plan should be shared with all assessors and internal verifiers while learners should also be given relevant information. An assessment plan should address most, if not all of the following points. It should:

- provide a calendar or timetable for unit assessment
- name the assessment methods to be used
- provide a rationale for your chosen assessment methods to ensure that each method of assessment is appropriate to the competence being assessed as defined in the units
- allocate units to particular assessors (if appropriate)
- describe how the assessments are to be administered, taking account of practical issues
- note arrangements that need to be made to take account of additional support needs
- note arrangements that need to be made to take account of prior learning
- describe the measures to be taken to ensure that the evidence produces authentic and current
- describe how and when requirements for record keeping and quality assurance processes will be met
- identify points for a review of your assessment practice and its impact on learners

Naturally-occurring evidence

You should also be aware that learners may generate evidence towards a unit without undertaking a formal assessment task. Such naturally occurring evidence may arise from their day-to-day learning and is perfectly acceptable, but it must be clearly identified and recorded so that it also may go through the internal verification process.

Think about the number of assessments in your plan

In SQA qualifications, it is not necessary to design an assessment activity to assess each outcome or performance criterion separately. SQA encourages a combined approach that allows evidence for a range of outcomes or performance criteria within or across more than one unit to be gathered. Such an approach can:

- take less time
- avoid over-assessment and improve motivation
- make the assessment process more meaningful for learners
- facilitate verification
- give assurance of overall competence
- benefit learning

A combined assessment can arise from identifying similar assessment requirements in different units, so a carefully chosen assessment method will remove the need for duplicate assessment.

You might also be able to identify an overarching task that allows evidence for a range of outcomes within or across more than one unit to be gathered by a single coherent activity.

If you are developing an assessment across units, you must be sure that the content of the units is sufficiently related to make the assessment coherent and meaningful to learners. Some assessment methods lend themselves more easily to combining outcomes and units than others. There is more information about this in the section on assessment methods.

You must also take care that combining the assessments does not make the assessment task more difficult for the learner by creating higher levels of demand than would otherwise be required.

The activities of a combined assessment should be included in an assessment plan and cross-referenced back to the outcomes. This will help to ensure that all outcomes of all the units have been achieved. This is particularly important with vocational qualifications, where not just elements but also performance criteria have to be cross-referenced to the activity and confirmed as achieved.

If you decide to develop a combined assessment, you should consider how you will deal with any need for remediation and re-assessment (see Section 8.8 Make opportunities for remediation and re-assessment).

5.3 Think about the learner as well as the assessment

The following questions may help you to reflect on ways to involve learners in the assessment process. This will encourage a sense of ownership of their learning.

- Does the assessment match the sequence of knowledge acquisition and/or skills development in their programme?
- Have you avoided excessive assessment by considering learner workloads both within and across units?
- Can you identify instances of naturally occurring evidence?
- Have you reduced over-assessment by identifying opportunities to combine assessments?
- Have you considered using digital assessment? A range of support and guidance is available on our digital assessment web page.
- Is the time required for assessment realistic?

To ensure that your assessments are equitable and fair, you should also consider these questions:

- Does the assessment offer all learners an equal opportunity to demonstrate their attainment?
- Are the scenarios or contexts in the assessment open and comprehensible to all learners?
- Could any part of the assessment or the assessment itself have an adverse impact on disabled learners and those with additional support needs or any other equality groups?
- Does any illustrative material reflect an inclusive view of society which promotes equality and presents a balanced viewpoint of world events from all perspectives? You may wish to refer to our Designing Inclusive Assessment course on SQA Academy for further information.
- Does any written content consider the use of inclusive language?

In accordance with legislation, SQA's position on assessment arrangements for disabled learners and those with additional support needs allows reasonable adjustments to be made to published assessment requirements. However, where qualifications confer a licence to practise we may not be able to permit adjustments. For guidance on assessment arrangements for disabled learners and those with additional support needs, consult the assessment arrangements web page

5.4 Choose assessment methods

The conditions of assessment, choice of an assessment method and the development of the assessment itself will require you to exercise your professional expertise and judgement.

Familiarity with the unit requirements will allow you to identify beforehand the skills that learners have to be able to demonstrate, and the knowledge and understanding that they need to attain.

You should bear in mind that unit assessments should:

- reflect and support learning activities
- be capable of generating evidence that is consistent with the required level of skills
- focus on larger themes, topics or tasks covering connected outcomes
- provide opportunities to combine assessments where appropriate

Just as assessment falls into the three categories of observation, product evaluation and questioning, so unit outcomes are written to describe:

- an activity that can be observed
- a product that can be evaluated
- knowledge, understanding, analytical skills and competences

Remember that the assessment of the full unit may involve a combination of some or all of the three types of assessment — a blended approach can be effective in meeting the outcomes and engaging learners. The way the outcomes are worded will help you to identify what needs to be assessed, and to consider a range of ways in which learners could generate the evidence needed to meet the standard of the unit.

The grid in Section 6 provides a short description of assessments categorised as one or more of observation, product evaluation and questioning, as well as a list of question types.

Once you have established what skills and knowledge and competences are to be assessed, you can start to identify the best assessment methods for your purpose and to decide on what will be acceptable as evidence to prove that the assessment task has been successfully carried out and meets the standard.

While you must have evidence to show that the learner has met all the outcomes of a unit, this does not mean that you must separately assess every item of knowledge or skill in that unit. This can fragment the learning process for learners. A planned and systematic sampling of the knowledge, understanding and skills contained in the unit is more effective, and helps learners to consolidate their learning.

In Higher National Qualifications, sampling can be used as an assessment approach to help reduce the assessment load. It is particularly appropriate for knowledge-based units, where assessing all the knowledge and skills items would require learners to produce an unacceptably large volume of evidence. In this type of unit, an assessor can infer that a learner who has demonstrated competence in a sample of knowledge items would also be competent in all items in the unit.

Sampling can also allow the use of a combined approach to assessment, which might not otherwise be feasible if learners had to produce evidence to cover all items in the Higher National Unit specification. There should be a quality statement covering all the knowledge items from which the sample will be selected so that, whatever the sample chosen, learners, assessors, and verifiers will be aware of the national standard of performance expected.

Your initial planning stage may already have identified instances in which it will be possible to use a combined approach. If not, you should consider this possibility again to avoid over-assessment and make the assessment process more meaningful for learners.

You should also consider the use of digital assessment as it provides many benefits, including:

- greater flexibility in when and where assessment can take place
- support for preferences in different learning styles and assessment approaches
- more immediate feedback to learners
- time savings for assessors
- support for learners who use assistive technologies
- support for learners who use assistive technologies

Recognition of prior learning

SQA recognises that learners develop knowledge and skills through experience and achievements acquired in formal, non-formal and informal learning contexts. It is possible to certificate this prior learning if it meets the standards of the contributing units of some qualification types. Further information is available from SQA's Recognition of Prior Learning webpage.

5.5 Developing an assessment

If you have considered all the points above, you should be confident that your choice of assessment method will:

- allow learners to produce sufficient evidence of the competences specified in the unit

- allow learners to produce evidence that can be measured against the assessment standards specified in the unit
- ensure that the demand of the assessment matches the level of the unit
- allow integration of assessment where possible
- be accessible to all learners who have the potential to achieve the unit, including disabled learners and those with additional support needs
- be inclusive by design for all equality groups, in the contexts and scenarios, as well as the language used in the assessment — for example in specific reference to race and LGBT+ equality
- be able to be carried out effectively and efficiently within the resources of your centre

You should now start to develop the assessment in detail. It might be helpful for you to use the following checklist.

1. What skills am I assessing?

2. What activities will allow a learner to demonstrate these skills?

3. Is the assessment fair and inclusive for all learners?

4. What evidence will be generated by the assessment activities?

5. Is the assessment proportionate to the time taken to carry it out?

6. Does it make best use of my available resources?

7. Could the assessment be carried out online?

8. Is it cost effective in terms of staff and learner time?

9. Does it help all assessors to make reliable assessment decisions where the same assessment task has been completed?

5.6 Define acceptable evidence for the assessment

In developing an assessment it is equally important to think about what you will accept as evidence and how this will be marked or measured. You should develop an assessment

scheme, or marking instructions, while you are creating the assessment. This will ensure that:

- The knowledge, product or performance evidence that you expect to receive from the learners will actually be generated by the assessment you have developed.
- Your assessment decisions will be consistent. A robust assessment scheme helps objectivity as you will be able to compare the evidence from learners with the requirements of your assessment scheme. This helps to ensure that you give credit to all learners in the same way.
- The assessment decisions of all assessors will be consistent. A robust assessment scheme helps to ensure that all assessors apply the same standards and all learners are given credit in the same way.
- The assessment process is as efficient as possible. A clear assessment scheme helps with transparency of the process and for it to be completed in a reasonable timeframe. This allows you to give learners their results and feedback as soon as possible. Learners will also understand what to expect from an assessment and the types of assessment method they will be required to undertake.

The type of evidence generated by the assessment will depend on the assessment method you have selected.

5.6.1 Observation and product evaluation

If you have chosen an assessment method involving observation or product evaluation, your assessment scheme will probably be a detailed checklist which defines:

- the full range of skills you expect to see demonstrated
- the expected performance levels
- the degree of technical tolerance that is acceptable, where appropriate

It is good practice to base a checklist on the unit standards, but it is not advisable simply to use the unit specification as your checklist, as this could lead to a fragmented approach to assessment and tell you very little about whether your learners are able to transfer skills to other contexts. Instead, you should aim to work across all the outcomes of the units to develop an integrated and coherent checklist for your particular assessment. This will also allow you to make the most of any naturally-occurring evidence that may be identified in the day-to-day delivery of the units or be generated as part of workplace assessment.

5.6.2 Questioning

If you have chosen an assessment method involving questions, whether written or oral*,* you should prepare a set of specimen solutions or acceptable responses and marking scheme. This allows you to consider what your questions actually mean and what you really want the learners to write or say in response. You should try to anticipate, as far as possible, all the acceptable responses to your questions. There should be a level of flexibility in the marking instructions to account for varying communication and writing styles, and learners' level of comprehension, particularly where English is an additional language. This is especially important with extended response assessment methods where there may be a wide range of acceptable solutions, and in professional discussions where the learner's responses will reflect their individual evidence.

If you have followed the guidance in this section, you should now have developed an assessment with high content and construct validity.

SQA exemplar material

SQA provides some exemplar assessments for National Units and Higher National Units whose validity has already been confirmed. You need to decide whether you are able to use the exemplar material as it is or to use it as the basis for developing your own assessment. If you choose to use an exemplar assessment, you are responsible for ensuring that you administer it — including maintaining the security of live SQA assessment materials — and any assessment or marking schemes correctly.

If you decide to use the exemplar as it stands, it is important to make sure that it is relevant to the context in which the unit is delivered in your own centre. Such exemplars are held on our secure site, which can only be accessed by the named SQA co-ordinator in your centre. A list of the materials is available on the internal assessment support materials web page.

SQA also has an online assessment system which provides pre-verified summative digital assessments for some qualifications, as well as quality assured formative assessments which are available to learners through our Open Assess portal.

If you decide to develop your own unit assessment, SQA strongly recommends that you request prior verification before using the assessment with learners. For more information see our NQ prior verification or HN prior verification web pages.

National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher Course Assessment

National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher Courses do not contain units. Each National Course has its own rationale and aims and has a set of design principles which outline the structure of the course and its assessment.

Course assessment at National 5 to Advanced Higher will sample the skills, knowledge and understanding from the mandatory course content, as well as breadth, depth, challenge, application and integration of these. Assessment for National Courses can take the form of a range of assessment methods, as appropriate to the course construct. Methods of assessment used by SQA are outlined in section 6.

6 Methods of assessment used by SQA

Note: Some SQA qualifications have specific rules on which methods may be used or are most appropriate.

Method	Types of assessment
Assignment: problem-solving exercise with clear guidelines, structure and length.	product evaluation; questioning
Case study: describes a realistic situation. Learners are prompted to analyse the situation, draw conclusions /make decisions/ suggest courses of action.	product evaluation; questioning
Dissertation: substantial written essay, treating a subject or issue in depth in a formal, methodical manner.	product evaluation
Examination/written test: collection of assessment methods which samples a domain of knowledge and/or skills.	questioning
Listening test: assesses listening skills using live or recorded stimulus. Learners demonstrate their understanding by oral or written responses.	questioning
Oral questions: assesses knowledge and understanding, may be linked to the assessment of a practical activity or performance.	product evaluation; questioning
Oral test: of a learner's listening and communication skills. It is often described as the 'assessment of speaking' or 'talking assignment'.	questioning
Performance: assesses skills of which the evidence is ephemeral.	observation
Portfolio: representative sample of learner evidence.	product evaluation
Practical activity: any activity which involves a technical, artistic or creative skill.	observation; product evaluation
Professional discussion: discussion of evidence already provided or demonstrated.	product evaluation; questioning
Project: task involving research or an investigative approach	product evaluation; questioning
Reflective report: assesses knowledge and understanding that may not be obvious from observation or product created.	Product evaluation
Simulation: structured practical exercise with specific objectives which seeks to simulate real-life conditions.	observation; product evaluation; questioning
Questioning (includes: alternative response; assertion/reason; cloze; completion; extended; grid; matching; multiple choice; multiple response; restricted response; short answer; structured).	questioning

Please note that reasonable adjustments may be made to enable disabled learners and those with additional support needs to access the assessment. However, the support must not result in a change to the published assessment standards or undermine the integrity of the qualification.

Where the qualification confers a licence to practise, it may not be possible to permit any reasonable adjustments. If you are in doubt as to whether the proposed assessment

arrangement or reasonable adjustment would compromise the assessment, please contact the Assessment Arrangements Team in the first instance to discuss the request.

6.1 Assignment

An assignment is a problem-solving exercise with clear guidelines, structure and specified length.

If the assignment takes the form of an investigation, learners are required to produce or interpret information and draw valid conclusions from the results.

Use

An assignment is particularly suited to the application of practical skills and related knowledge and understanding to a situation that involves task management.

Advantages

- Relatively straightforward to develop.
- Can access a wide range of both cognitive and practical competences.
- Provides learners with the opportunity to demonstrate initiative.
- Can be used to integrate assessment across outcomes and units.

Limitations

- Can be time-consuming to complete.
- Care has to be taken to achieve reliability in marking because of the range of approaches that the learners might adopt in undertaking their assignments.
- Care has to be taken that any 'write-up' does not skew the assessment as assignments assess learners' problem-solving abilities.

Significant construction features

- The brief for the assignment must be clearly defined.
- A checklist must be developed defining the outcomes to be covered and the standards to be achieved; this will help to ensure that the assessment is valid and reliable, and the requirements of the situation defined in the brief are met. This checklist should not simply consist of a set of boxes to tick but must allow space for the assessor to reference evidence against the outcome or standard.

6.2 Case study

A case study consists of a description of an event, usually in the form of a piece of text, a picture or an electronic recording that concerns a realistic situation. This is then followed by a series of instructions which prompt the learner, as a detached observer of events, to analyse the situation, identify key issues, draw conclusions and make decisions or suggest courses of action.

It is important to remember that in many case studies there are no 'correct' answers and no 'correct' methods of arriving at the decisions. The importance lies in the process of interpretation and decision-making that leads the learner to a valid conclusion.

Use

Case studies are designed to provide opportunities for exercising problem- solving and decision-making skills. They allow learners to demonstrate skills of information-gathering, analysis and time management.

Advantages

- The realism/vocational relevance of a case study can be a useful way of motivating learners.
- Allows individual initiative to be exercised.
- Allows application of theoretical learning to navigating real life scenarios
- Allows learners to explore complex issues without involving them in the stress of the real-life situation.
- Can be used to integrate assessment across outcomes and units.

Limitations

- It can be difficult to devise good case studies.
- Consistency in marking might appear difficult to achieve because of the range of approaches that the learners might adopt. Marking should focus on each aspect of analysis, problem-solving and the proposed solution or conclusion.

Significant construction features

- The brief for the case study must be clearly defined.
- A checklist must be developed defining the outcomes to be covered and the standards to be achieved. This will help to ensure that the assessment is valid and reliable, and that the requirements of the situation defined in the case study are met. This should not simply consist of a set of boxes to tick but must allow space for the assessor to reference evidence against the outcome.

6.3 Dissertation

- A dissertation is a substantial written essay, treating a subject or issue in depth in a formal, methodical manner. It will be based on research on the literature for the subject, and may also involve some original research.
- Use
- Dissertations are used to test learners' ability to apply their knowledge in a critical way, to evaluate evidence from a range of sources, to draw valid conclusions from this evidence and to present their ideas in a clear and coherent report.

Dissertation

A dissertation is a substantial written essay, treating a subject or issue in depth in a formal, methodical manner. It will be based on research on the literature for the subject, and may also involve some original research.

Use

Dissertations are used to test learners' ability to apply their knowledge in a critical way, to evaluate evidence from a range of sources, to draw valid conclusions from this evidence and to present their ideas in a clear and coherent report.

Advantages

- Allows scope for self-expression.
- Tests higher-order skills.
- Can be used to integrate assessment across outcomes and units.

Limitations

- Time-consuming to mark.
- Care has to be taken to ensure reliability because of the wide range of approaches that learners might take.

Significant construction features

- Requires a brief to be developed and agreed with the learner.
- Requires review of the learner's progress from time to time.
- A checklist must be developed defining the outcomes to be covered and the standards to be achieved. This will help to ensure that the assessment is valid and reliable and that the requirements of the brief are met. This should not simply consist of a set of boxes to tick but must allow space for the assessor to reference evidence against the outcome or standard.

6.4 Exam or written assessment

An exam or written assessment is used to sample a domain of knowledge and skills. It is administered under supervised conditions and is therefore kept confidential beforehand.

Depending on the level of the qualification, an exam will assess the range of learners' ability to recall information, demonstrate understanding, interpret, apply their knowledge, solve problems, analyse and evaluate.

Use

- To assess whether the learner can retain, integrate and consolidate the knowledge, understanding and skills gained in individual units.
- To grade attainment.

Advantages

- Taken under highly controlled conditions, which ensures the confidentiality of the material and minimises any chance of malpractice.
- Marking is subject to a series of rigorous checks, so reliability should be high.

Limitations

- May lead to 'teaching to the test', to the detriment of learning.
- Not a suitable assessment method to account for different learning styles and for those who best demonstrate their competence through oral or practical methods
- Not useful for assessing all cognitive skills, for example, creative writing.

Significant construction features

- The language used in the question paper should not be a barrier. It is important to ensure you use plain English and inclusive language in your assessment materials. You may wish to refer to our Designing Inclusive Assessment course on SQA Academy for further information.

- The weighting given to a particular part of the question paper reflects its relative importance.
- Sampling is systematic but unpredictable to avoid question 'spotting'.
- The level of difficulty of the individual questions is appropriate.
- The mark available for each question must match the demands of the task and the test specification.
- The level of difficulty of the overall paper must be appropriate to the level of the qualification.
- The marking instructions must allow for a range of valid answers for open- ended questions.

6.5 Listening test

A listening test assesses listening skills using live or recorded stimulus. It is sometimes known as 'listening comprehension'. Learners demonstrate their understanding of audio material by producing oral or written responses.

Use

Frequently used in language courses and music studies.

Advantages

- Can be offered and marked online.
- Can allow considerable coverage of content.
- A valid assessment method for assessing a learner's ability to distinguish nuances in auditory stimuli

Limitations

- Can be difficult to manage with large numbers of learners if oral responses are required.
- Can be demanding of resources such as time, facilities and assessors.
- Present barriers for learners with hearing impairments, including hearing loss and deaf learners

Significant construction features

- A checklist must be developed defining the outcomes to be covered and the standards to be achieved; this will help to ensure that the assessment is valid and reliable.
- The stimulus needs to be written/developed in advance and used consistently with all learners.
- A detailed set of specimen solutions must be prepared so that there is a clear understanding, on the part of all assessors, of the credit available to a range of possible responses.

6.6 Oral questions

Oral questions assess knowledge and understanding. They may be linked to the assessment of a practical activity or performance.

Use

Oral questions are most often used in assessment when a learner has been observed carrying out a practical task competently but knowledge and understanding associated with the task must also be assessed.

They may also be used as an alternative to written questions.

Advantages

- Can occur naturally out of an observation and so assist integration of assessment.
- Can be non-threatening to the learner.
- Can be used when there are some gaps in the learner's portfolio of evidence.
- Can be offered to learners with disabilities or additional support needs as a reasonable adjustment.
- Can be used to authenticate evidence.

Limitations

- Can be difficult to manage with large numbers of learners.
- Care must be taken to achieve reliability because of the range of responses that the learners might give.

Significant construction features

- A range of questions must be developed to meet the requirements of the outcomes.
- It is important to ensure you use plain English and inclusive language in your assessment materials. You may wish to refer to our Designing Inclusive Assessment course on SQA Academy for further information.
- If used as an alternative to written questions, a detailed set of marking instructions must be prepared so that there is a clear understanding, on the part of all assessors, of the credit available to a range of possible responses.
- The assessment should be recorded.

6.7 Oral test

An oral test is a test of the learner's communication skills. It is often described as the 'assessment of speaking' or 'talking assessment.

Oral tests may take the form of a presentation on a topic chosen by the learner and a follow-up discussion with the assessor. This can also be carried out on a one-on-one basis between the learner and another person, whether another learner or the assessor. Learners are expected to convey information and deploy ideas. They may describe personal experiences. Learners can be assessed individually or as part of a group discussion.

Use

It is used to provide evidence of learners' ability to interpret and communicate ideas and to sustain conversation, either in English or in another language.

Advantages

It provides a valid means of assessing skills that involve self-expression.

Limitations

- Can be difficult to manage with large numbers of learners.
- Can be a barrier for learners with different learning styles who best demonstrate their competence through written or practical methods, and those with language or speech difficulties.
- Can be demanding of resources such as time, facilities and assessors.
- Care must be taken to achieve reliability because of the range of responses that the learners might give.

Significant construction features

- A brief must be developed for learners.
- It is important to ensure you use plain English, and clear and inclusive language in your assessment materials that can is accessible to a wide range of learners. You may wish to refer to our Designing Inclusive Assessment course on SQA Academy for further information.
- A checklist must be developed defining the outcome to be covered and the standards to be achieved. This will help to ensure that the assessment is valid and reliable and that the purposes of the discussion are met. This should not simply consist of a set of boxes to tick but must allow space for the assessor to reference evidence against the outcome or standard.
- Oral tests should be recorded for quality assurance and verification purposes.

6.8 Performance

A performance is a particular type of practical activity that is used for the assessment of skills where the evidence is fleeting. It allows learners to demonstrate their abilities and skills and so the **process** is normally the focus of the assessment, although the quality of the performance as a finished product may also be assessed.

In some cases, the learner will also be required to analyse and reflect upon their performance, for example by providing a commentary, and this product may also be assessed.

Use

- Widely used to assess vocational skills.
- Provides evidence of skills in music / dance/ drama / sporting activities.

Advantages

- Assesses skills in a ‘live’ environment.
- Can be very motivating for learners.
- May be used to integrate assessment.

Limitations

- Can be very time-consuming to carry out with large numbers of learners.
- Care has to be taken to ensure reliability of assessment decisions.
- Requires the performance to be recorded for quality assurance of assessment decisions to ensure reliability.

Significant construction features

- A checklist must be developed defining the outcomes to be covered and the standards to be achieved. This will help to ensure that the assessment is valid and reliable and that the requirements of the brief are met. This should not simply consist of a set of boxes to tick but must allow space for the assessor to reference evidence against the outcome.
- If a learner commentary is to be assessed, information on suitable content, context and marking method should be developed and shared with all assessors and learners.

6.9 Portfolio

A portfolio is a means of presenting multiple pieces of evidence of learner achievement. It is a representative collection of different pieces of evidence of a learner's skills, knowledge, understanding and competence which indicates that they have met the requirements of a qualification. They can be produced in a range of media. These days, e-portfolios or cloud-based software are becoming the norm when compiling and storing portfolios.

Uses

- Portfolios are frequently used to gather evidence for a full qualification in vocational provision.
- Portfolios are also appropriate for subjects with strong practical and/or creative content.

Advantages

- Can be used to collect naturally-occurring evidence which makes this an inclusive assessment methods for learners with different learning and communication styles.
- Provides the learner with the opportunity to demonstrate personal initiative.
- Allows the inclusion of photographic/electronic evidence.
- Allows considerable scope for personalisation.
- Can provide the opportunity to integrate assessment across outcomes and units.

Limitations

- Assessment should be on-going throughout the compilation of the portfolio. This can be time-consuming as each learner will produce different evidence.
- Care has to be taken to achieve reliability in marking because of the variety of evidence that the learners might produce.
- Requires learners, assessors and verifiers to have access to (and be familiar with) any digital file formats used for e-portfolios, and the medium used for portfolio evidence for valid and robust assessment decisions to be made

Significant construction features

- Portfolios must be designed to allow the learner and assessor to identify each piece of evidence against the relevant outcomes and/or standards.
- Portfolios must contain some form of referencing, such as a contents checklist and index of evidence. This is important because the content of each portfolio may vary as learners can include a variety of evidence. This allows the learner and assessor to ensure that the necessary evidence has been produced. It also allows assessment judgements to be more easily reached if the evidence is available in a logical sequence.
- The production of a well organised, clearly labelled portfolio which relates each piece of evidence to the outcomes requires a methodical approach by learners and assessors.
- A checklist must be developed defining the outcomes to be covered and the standards to be achieved. This will help to ensure that the assessment is valid and reliable and also

allows space for the assessor to reference evidence against the outcome for each aspect of the portfolio.

6.10 Practical activity

A practical activity consists of any activity that allows learners to demonstrate their technical, artistic and creative skills. The assessment may be based on the end-result of the activity (the product), or the carrying-out of the activity (the process), or a combination of both.

In some subjects, demonstrating a practical skill can show that learners can apply the knowledge needed to demonstrate competence. In other subjects, the underpinning knowledge may not be so clearly apparent. In such cases, an additional assessment such as questioning may be required to supplement any observation of the skill.

Use

Practical activities allow learners to display their specialised skills and techniques and can provide evidence of practical skills gained, for example, in the workplace

Advantages

- Assesses 'real-life' skills.
- The completion of an artefact/product/service provides tangible evidence of achievement.
- Practical activity can be very motivating for learners.
- May be used to integrate assessment across outcomes and units.

Limitations

- Can raise issues of resources and time.
- Unexpected circumstances, for example injury or deterioration of physical disabilities, may prevent a learner from demonstrating their acquired competence.

Significant construction features

- A brief or technical specification needs to be clearly defined for learners.
- A checklist must be developed defining the outcomes to be covered and the standards to be achieved. This will help to ensure that the assessment is valid and reliable, and that the requirements of the situation defined in the task or brief are met. This should not simply consist of a set of boxes to tick but must allow space for the assessor to reference evidence against the outcome. If the process is to be assessed, a clear set of questions and range of appropriate responses should be developed.

6.11 Professional discussion

A professional discussion between a learner and an assessor focuses on evidence already provided or demonstrated by the learner. This is likely to consist of real work activities, practical tasks, a case study, project, portfolio or some other form of assessment.

The assessor starts by asking the learner questions about the evidence, and a discussion ensues. The assessor must record the discussion. The assessor is responsible for ensuring that the points that need to be covered are brought into the discussion by the learner.

A professional discussion is not a substitute for the demonstration of skills. The learner needs to be able to show the assessor how what he or she says in the discussion is backed

up in other ways. This could be, for example, by product evidence, witness testimonies, workplace documents or other material either developed though work or in other assessments.

Use

- Allows learner to demonstrate the authenticity of his or her evidence, and for the assessor to confirm its reliability and validity.
- Provides evidence when gaps have been identified in a learner's portfolio.
- Suitable for assessing higher-order analytical and decision-making skills.

Advantages

- The assessor is able to target particular areas for discussion and can gain additional evidence while the assessment is in progress.
- The professional discussion can be used to integrate assessment.
- Helps to make use of naturally occurring evidence in the assessment of some higher-order vocational learning.

Limitations

- Time-consuming to set up, prepare for and manage large numbers of learners.
- Additional evidence may not be missed if this is not targeted by the assessor in discussion with the learner.
- Care has to be taken to ensure reliability because of the range of approaches that the learners might adopt in the discussion.
- Risk of leading the learner if not used correctly.

Significant construction features

- The assessment is wide-ranging and likely to cover outcomes from a number of units.
- The purpose of this assessment and its focus need to be clearly defined and agreed between assessor and learner.
- The assessor must make a plan for the assessment and give this to the learner.
- A checklist must be developed defining the outcomes to be covered and achieved. This will help to ensure that the assessment is valid and reliable and that the purposes of the discussion are met. This should not simply consist of a set of boxes to tick but must allow space for the assessor to reference evidence against the outcome.
- A professional discussion must be recorded.

6.12 Project

A project is a task which usually requires a research or investigative approach. A significant part of the work is carried out without close supervision, although guidance and support may be provided by the assessor.

The choice of project may be directed by the assessor, usually by providing the learner with a topic or brief as a basis.

Use

Projects provide a useful way of bringing together assessment of a wide range of skills, and of integrating different activities both within and across units. They are particularly suited to assessment of outcomes concerned with analysis, synthesis and evaluation. Projects are

most effective when the learners concerned already possess the necessary skills in planning, accessing resource material and writing reports.

Advantages

- Can assess a wide range of high-order cognitive and practical skills.
- Provides the learner with the opportunity to demonstrate personal initiative.
- Can provide the opportunity to integrate assessment across a number of outcomes and units.

Limitations

- Assessment should be on-going for each stage of the project from initial planning to final report. This can be time-consuming for assessors as each learner may have a different project.
- Report writing and referencing styles are specific to the qualification and vocation.
- Care has to be taken to achieve consistency in assessing because of the range of approaches that the learners might adopt in undertaking their projects.

Significant construction features

The brief needs to be clearly defined and agreed with learners. It should include the following aspects, each of which should be assessed during the project:

- project plan
- carrying out the project activities
- reviewing/analysing the project findings
- evaluating the success of the project

A checklist must be developed defining the outcomes to be covered and the standards to be achieved in the learners' projects. This will help to ensure that the assessment is valid and reliable and that the requirements of the brief are met. This should not simply consist of a set of boxes to tick but must allow space for the assessor to reference evidence against the outcome for each aspect of the project.

6.13 Reflective reports

Reflective reports are used to elicit how a learner completed an activity in a certain way or how they produced a product of their work, against a national standard.

Reflective reports can help identify knowledge and understanding that the learner has that might not be obvious from an observation or a product they have created.

Advantages

- Can be used to confirm knowledge.
- Can be used to integrate assessment.
- Learners produce reports and are free to do so in any way that befits their product or observation evidence.
- This assessment is wide ranging and can cover outcomes from a number of units.

Limitations

- Care should be taken not to ask learners to demonstrate competence beyond what is required by the standards.
- Care should be taken that reflective reports are not produced as a substitute to a more valid, reliable, practicable, equitable and fair method of assessment.

Significant construction features

- The purpose of this assessment and its focus need to be clearly defined and agreed between assessor and learner.
- The assessor must make a plan for the assessment and give this to the learner.

6.14 Simulation

A simulation is a structured practical exercise with specific objectives involving the organisation and completion of a product or resource-based task and which seeks to simulate real-life conditions.

In a simulation the learners are active participants who shape the result by their involvement. To be effective, simulations must succeed in recreating the atmosphere, conditions and pressures of the real situation. A simulation focuses on a particular activity and aims to test behavioural, analytical and decision-making skills in a realistic setting.

Be careful not to confuse assessment by simulation with assessment in a realistic work environment (RWE), such as a training restaurant. You should be aware that reproducing a realistic working environment can be costly and time- consuming for centres. One way of doing this is to form a partnership with an employer who can provide the workplace environment, but who does not necessarily have the expertise in assessment.

Sector skills councils often produce separate guidance on what constitutes a realistic working environment (RWE) for the qualifications they develop, and you must comply with these requirements.

Use

Simulations are used where assessment would be difficult to carry out for various reasons, such as health and safety, expense, client confidentiality, or dealing with contingency or emergency situations. Your decision to use simulation should be guided by references to simulation stipulated in the national standards. The evidence requirements for vocational qualifications stipulate the circumstances in which simulation is and is not allowed.

Reproducing real-life situations can be costly and time-consuming, so it is important to consider cost-effectiveness along with issues of validity and reliability. So, apart from ensuring that your plans to use simulation are in line with the guidance given in the unit specification (or in the assessment strategy for VQs), you should also ask yourself how critical and frequent is the activity which your learners have to be able to demonstrate.

If the activity is critical and routine, the proportion and nature of the evidence for this activity is particularly important. For example, a learner might be responsible for installing power appliances every day, but failure to meet health and safety requirement could be disastrous. You might want to think about obtaining evidence from different sources or using

different methods of assessment so that you can be absolutely certain of your judgement. In this type of case, simulation might be useful in complementing naturally-occurring performance evidence.

If the activity is less critical but routine, the assessment would be best carried out using naturally-occurring evidence from the workplace. However, simulation may be necessary in circumstances where direct observation is unacceptable, for example, because confidentiality is an issue.

If the activity is critical and rare, simulation may be best used as a substitute for naturally-occurring evidence. You could use simulation, for example, where you are trying to assess how a learner would handle a contingency, but where disruption to the workflow would have health and safety, and cost, implications.

If the activity is less critical but rare, simulation might be required because the opportunities for assessment do not arise often. However, you would need to weigh up the costs of using simulation very carefully — since the activity being assessed is not as important as others, the evidence generated will be very limited in what it can tell you about the learner's expertise.

Advantages

- Allows individual initiative to be exercised.
- Gives learners the opportunity of displaying (and developing acquired) skills they are likely to need in the world of work.
- Assessment carried out in a 'safe' environment.
- Learners are likely to be motivated by the realism of the assessment.
- Some simulations can be carried out online.

Limitations

- Often difficult or expensive to simulate real situations.
- Requires experienced tutors to handle well and to create a safe assessment environment for learners.
- May be difficult to manage with larger groups.
- Reliability of assessment decisions may be difficult to achieve.

Significant construction features

- The simulated situation should be designed to represent real, credible circumstances and must meet the national standards.
- The brief for the simulation needs to be clearly defined.
- Any resources or equipment that would normally be in real work should be available and in working order for the simulation.
- Learners should complete the required tasks in the timescales that would normally be expected in real work, taking account of any legislation and regulations that would apply in real work.
- A checklist must be developed defining the outcomes to be covered and the standards to be achieved in the simulation. This will help to ensure that the assessment is valid and reliable and that the requirements of the brief are met.

7 Types of questioning

There are many different question types, so it is important that you consider the type of information you wish to test or explore. This can include the recall of information, demonstration of understanding, interpretation, application of knowledge, problem solving, analysis, and evaluation. The information on the uses, advantages and limitations of different question types in this section should help you in your choice of appropriate question.

7.1 Alternative response (True / False)

In this type of question, the learner is presented with a statement followed by two alternatives (eg true / false, yes / no), only one of which is correct.

Use

Alternative response items may be used to assess the recall of information or the ability to discriminate. They can provide an encouraging lead-in to assessment, but because it is possible to guess the correct response, they are better used for self-assessment and diagnostic assessment than for summative assessment.

Advantages

- Easy to construct and mark.
- Can be used as a self-assessment and diagnostic tool.
- Can be used to generate discussion with learners.
- Can be offered and marked online.

Limitation

- There is a 50% chance of guessing the correct answer.
- Unclear wording of questions can lead to learners falsely choosing the wrong answer

Significant construction features

- Use positive rather than negative statements.
- Make sure there is a roughly equal distribution of true and false statements.
- Avoid lengthy and ambiguous statements. It is important to ensure you use plain English and inclusive language in your assessment materials. You may wish to refer to our Designing Inclusive Assessment course on SQA Academy for further information.
- Set the pass mark high to counter the guess factor.

Additional ‘not known’ response

- The high guess factor in True / False exercises can be mitigated by adding a third option — ‘not known’.
- In this form of alternative response question, the learner is presented with a passage of text for interpretation and responds to a series of statements to which the answers can be true/false/not known.

Advantages of this variation

- Reduces the guess factor.
- Can be used to assess higher-order skills such as reasoning.

Limitation of this variation

- Can be complex to construct the passage.
- it is unclear whether learners do not understand the question or if there is insufficient information in the question to allow them to determine whether the statement is true or false.

7.2 Assertion/reason

This type of question consists of an assertion and a supporting explanation.

The learner is asked to select the answer from a list of possibilities, usually five, deciding whether the assertion and the explanation are individually true, and if true, whether the explanation is a valid reason for the assertion.

Use

These questions can be effective in assessing the higher-order skills of analysis and evaluation.

Advantages

- Highly complex and demanding matters can be assessed relatively quickly because the item supplies all the information required — all the learners have to do is to use their analytical skills to work out the correct answer.
- allows learners to provide further information to demonstrate their rationale for their chosen response
- Can be offered and marked online.

Limitations

- Language and complex assertion statements can be difficult to understand. Careful wording of statements are required to avoid leading a learner towards a particular viewpoint Very dependent on the skill of the assessor to produce plausible reasons that are applicable to the assertion.
- No credit is given for partial knowledge.

Significant construction features

- The reason should be a free-standing sentence so that it can be considered separately from the assertion.
- Avoid supplying minor or insignificant reasons — these could result in an ambiguous
- question.

It is important to ensure you use plain English and inclusive language in your assessment materials. You may wish to refer to our Designing Inclusive Assessment course on SQA Academy for further information.

7.3 Cloze (embedded answer)

The learner is presented with a passage of text from which a number of words have been removed. In some cases, a list of words or phrases is supplied, and the learner selects the missing words. In others, no prompt is given and it is left to the learners to decide on the appropriate word.

Use

Cloze questions can be used as an alternative to multiple choice and short answer questions to test recall and reasoning. They are also frequently used to assess vocabulary, comprehension and grammatical accuracy in first and additional language learning. They can also be used as an alternative to multiple choice and short answer questions to test recall and reasoning.

Advantages

- Allow considerable coverage of content by making it possible for the learner to respond easily and quickly.
- Allows learners to demonstrate their understanding of concepts to different contexts
- Are useful for formative assessment.
- Can be offered and marked online.

Limitations

- Ambiguous language and complex questions can be difficult to understand. Careful wording of statements is required to avoid leading a learner towards a particular viewpoint
- In more complex tests the variety of possible responses can increase the learners' uncertainty and can make marking more difficult.
- Although there should be only one possible word for each blank space, the higher the level of the assessment, the more varied the likely response.

Significant construction features

- Usually there is no gap in the first 14 or so words.
- It is important to ensure you use plain English and inclusive language in your assessment materials. You may wish to refer to our Designing Inclusive Assessment course on SQA Academy for further information. One blank space should be provided for each word removed.
- Too many blank spaces should be avoided, as the meaning of the statement might become ambiguous.
- There should be only one possible word for each blank space.

Note

A variant of this question type is the 'spot the mistake' test, which can be used to identify spelling errors and incorrect usage of words or grammar. However, this can be a barrier for learners with a spelling difficulty.

7.4 Completion

This type of question is really a variation of the short answer question. The learner is required to supply the words that complete a given statement or to label various parts of a diagram.

Use

While completion questions provide a convenient means of assessing recall of factual information, they can also be used to test the understanding and application of mathematical concepts. Any marking instructions developed must ensure that there is adequate flexibility regarding the language learners use to complete the assessment.

Advantages

- Can be easy to administer.
- Can easily be used for self and diagnostic assessment.
- Allows considerable coverage of content by making it possible for learners to respond easily and quickly to the question.
- Can be offered and marked online.

Limitations

- If there is more than one option as an answer, marking becomes more difficult.
- Plausible responses might sometimes be difficult to identify.

Significant construction features

- Only the key words in the statement should be left blank.
- Diagrams should be clearly identified and the parts requiring to be named should be clearly shown.
- There should be only one possible word or phrase for each blank space.

7.5 Extended response

This type of written question has comparatively few restrictions on the content and form of the response. Continuous prose is normally expected, but there may be limits imposed on the length or the time allocated (or both). The content can be as open-ended as the assessor wishes.

If the question relates to an investigation or research project, the response may be in the form of a report describing the aims, methodology, findings and conclusions.

Essay: a form of extended response which is usually transactional — the learner is asked to produce a piece of non-fiction writing that conveys factual information or argues the validity of a point of view, with objective evidence. Transactional essays require technical writing skills as well as a logical line of thought.

Use

Extended response questions are particularly suitable for assessing the cognitive skills of analysis, synthesis and evaluation. They provide a way of assessing a learner's command of language, powers of analysis, discrimination in choice of evidence, and skills in argument.

Advantages

- Relatively easy to construct.
- Allows considerable scope for self-expression.

Limitations

- Reliability may be more difficult to achieve because of the range of approaches that the learners might adopt in their responses.
- the nature of learner's responses to a given question or stimulus leaves the marking procedure open to potential bias
- Makes considerable demands on learner's writing abilities.
- Is time-consuming for the learner and for the marker.

- Often covers a relatively small area of content.
- Difficult to devise unambiguous questions that will elicit valid responses.

Significant construction features

The questions should be phrased in such a way that the learner's task is clearly indicated. A detailed set of marking instructions must be prepared so that there is a clear understanding, on the part of all assessors, as to the expected answers and the range of responses.

7.6 Grid

Grid questions provide an alternative to matching questions. They consist of a series of possible responses presented in a grid format, together with a number of related questions. The learner is required to select those responses that are appropriate for each question from the grid.

They differ from the other selected response types of assessment in that each question may have more than one correct response and each response may be used more than once.

Use

Grid questions can be used to assess the recall, comprehension and application of knowledge.

Advantages

- There is a lower chance of a correct guess compared with other multiple choice/response types.
- Useful for assessing topics involving large amounts of factual information in an economical manner.
- Can be offered and marked online.

Limitations

- Restricted to situations where a large number of plausible responses can be identified.
- It can be difficult and time-consuming to construct good questions.

Significant construction features

All responses should be plausible.

7.7 Matching

Matching questions present a learner with two lists — a set of statements and a set of responses. The learner is then required to indicate which response from the second list corresponds with, or matches, each statement in the first list.

Use

Matching questions can be used to assess the recall, comprehension and application of knowledge.

Advantage

- Useful for assessing topics involving large amounts of factual information in an economical manner.
- Can be offered and marked online.

Limitation

- Restricted to situations where sufficient plausible responses can be identified — four is probably the minimum.
- Can be difficult and time-consuming to construct good questions.

Significant construction features

- The answer list should be larger than the first list to reduce the chance of guessing by a process of elimination.
- There should be no more than one correct response for each statement.
- All responses should be plausible.

7.8 Multiple choice

Multiple choice questions or items consist of an incomplete statement or a question, known as the ‘stem’, followed by at least three plausible alternative responses from which the learner has to select the correct one. The correct response is known as the ‘key’, while the incorrect ones are referred to as ‘distractors’. Multiple choice questions are often called ‘objective tests’.

Use

Multiple choice questions are frequently used to assess at the level of recall and understanding and, if carefully constructed, can also be used to assess higher-order cognitive skills

Advantages

- Allow considerable coverage of content.
- Can be offered and marked online.
- Can provide rapid feedback to learners and assessors.
- Can be used for diagnostic purposes.
- Can be used to assess a wide range of cognitive skills.

Limitations

- Often perceived as being mainly for testing the recall of factual information.
- Do not allow learners to express themselves.
- Often difficult to construct good items which are unambiguously worded and which will elicit the key.
- It is often difficult to devise enough plausible distractors for certain topics.

Significant construction features

- The stem should contain as much information as possible.
- Negative statements should be avoided in the stem.
- All the responses should be of approximately the same length.

- The responses should be grammatically correct, unambiguous and consistent with the stem.
- None of the responses should be synonymous.
- All distractors should be feasible but there should only be one key.
- The position of the key in the options should be randomised.
- Items should be tested before use to check validity, reliability and the difficulty level.

7.9 Multiple response

Multiple response questions are a variant of multiple choice questions where more than one of the alternatives given is correct. The learner can either select any number and combination of those alternatives, or be told the number of options that may be selected. As they can be answered in a wide variety of ways, multiple response questions are more complex than multiple choice questions.

Uses

Multiple response questions are frequently used to assess at the level of recall and understanding. If carefully constructed, they can also be used to assess some of the higher cognitive skills.

Advantages

- Can be offered and marked online.
- Can help to reduce the element of guessing.

Limitations

- Questions can be difficult to construct.
- Require a high level of deductive skill to understand how to answer the question.
- The learner may receive no credit for partial knowledge.

Significant construction features

- The stem should contain as much information as possible.
- Negative statements should be avoided in the stem.
- All the responses should be of approximately the same length.
- The responses should be grammatically correct, unambiguous and consistent with the stem.
- None of the responses should be synonymous.
- There needs to be a wide range of distractors and keys.
- All distractors should be feasible.
- The position of keys in the options should be randomised.
- Items should be tested before use to check validity, reliability and the difficulty level.

7.10 Restricted response

Restricted response questions are so called because although the form and content of the response is limited by the way the question is asked, they do give learners a measure of self-expression.

Restricted response questions differ from short answer questions as the correct answers are not all predetermined and, consequently, the assessors have to exercise their professional judgement when interpreting learners' responses.

Restricted response questions restrict the learners' responses in two ways:

- by the way the question is phrased
- through the scope or aspect of the subject area being assessed

Use

Restricted response questions can be used to assess factual recall, but they are probably most appropriate for assessing outcomes concerned with understanding and reasoning.

Advantage

- Easy to produce.
- Can be constructed to cover a wide range of content.
- Allow the learner a measure of self-expression.
- Can be offered and marked online.

Limitations

Care has to be taken to ensure reliability because learners may give responses that are not expected.

Significant construction features

- The questions should be phrased in such a way that the learner's task is clearly indicated.
- A detailed set of marking instructions must be prepared so that there is a clear understanding, on the part of all assessors, as to the expected answers and the range of responses.

7.11 Short answer

This type of question involves learners being presented with a question with a predetermined answer. These questions may use words, numbers, diagrams or graphs.

Use

Although generally used to assess the recall of factual information, they can also test the understanding and application of knowledge, for example mathematical concepts.

Advantages

- Can be offered and marked online.
- Less time-consuming to construct than multiple choice or matching items.
- Reduce the opportunity for guessing.

Limitations

- Tend to be used only for lower levels of cognitive competence.
- Can be restricted to a small area of content.

Significant construction features

- They should be phrased in such a way that the learner's task is clearly indicated.
- A detailed set of marking instructions must be prepared so that there is a clear understanding, on the part of all assessors, of the expected answers.

7.12 Structured

A structured question consists of a stem (which describes a situation) followed by a series of related questions. The stem can be text, a diagram, a picture or multi-media.

Use

While structured questions can be devised to assess the recall of knowledge, they are probably most useful for the assessment of comprehension and the application of knowledge.

Advantages

- Less reliant on learners' writing ability than extended response questions.
- Can be easier to achieve reliability than extended response questions since the learners are led through the question and are less likely to stray from the subject or miss the point.

Limitation

- Often restricted to a limited area of content.
- Care has to be taken that failure in one part does not affect the learners' answers in succeeding parts.

Significant construction features

- Questions should be based on, and relevant to, the stem.
- Questions should be phrased in such a way that the learner's task is clearly indicated.
- Questions based on recall are inappropriate.
- A detailed set of marking instructions must be prepared so that there is a clear understanding, on the part of all assessors, as to the expected answers and the range of responses.

8 How can I ensure reliability?

Reliability is a measure of the degree of consistency with which assessment evidence is judged. In other words, assessment decisions should be consistent across all assessors for all learners undertaking the same assessment task.

Reliability is achieved by:

- assessments with high content and construct validity
- the use of consistent conditions of assessment
- standardisation exercises by assessors

Validity and reliability are interdependent — an assessment that produces inconsistent results cannot provide valid information about a learner's achievement. On the other hand, highly consistent results do not necessarily indicate high validity, since the assessment could be inappropriate for the skill being assessed. You should therefore be conscious of reliability while you are developing your assessment as well as in the fair administration and marking of that assessment.

You also need to be aware that there can be a danger that your decisions could be unconsciously biased by factors that have no bearing on the assessment process. For example, appearance and dress, unless there are stipulations about these in the units, should not be allowed to influence your decision. Untidy writing and presentation should not distract you from the possible high quality of a learner's work — again unless there are stipulations in the units.

You should consider means of reducing any possible subjectivity in your assessment decisions as this is a very important aspect of fairness to learners.

In any assessment system, procedures have to be put in place to ensure reliability.

Following the steps below will help you to ensure that appropriate and consistent assessment decisions are reached.

8.1 Ensuring reliability — the key steps

- Check the assessment and assessment scheme
- Assess the learner
- Provide reasonable support
- Judge evidence
- Check consistency of assessment judgements
- Record assessment decisions
- Re-assessment issues
- Record final assessment result

8.2 Check the assessment and assessment scheme

You must check your assessment and assessment scheme before they are used with learners. It can be more difficult to ensure reliability with some assessment methods than others. There is more about this in the descriptions of individual assessment methods in section 6.

All SQA centres must have an effective internal quality assurance system, as explained in *Internal Verification: A Guide for Centres.*

The usual way of ensuring that assessments are appropriate for their purpose is to consult with the internal verifier — another experienced subject expert. The internal verifier is responsible for reviewing your assessment and assessment scheme to confirm that they:

- are of a suitable standard
- meet the relevant specification
- are valid and practicable
- pose no unnecessary barriers to learners

Even after an assessment has been administered to the learners, you might have to make further adjustments to your assessment scheme or marking instructions. For example, for process or practical skills, you might, after assessing a few learners, find that the observation checklist needs to be amended. For a written test, where a group of learners are completing an assessment at the same time, you might have to make changes to the marking instructions to include more answers. It is essential to make sure that all learners are assessed according to the same marking instructions or checklist of requirements.

Any changes that are agreed to these must be communicated promptly to all assessors and internal verifiers. These changes need also to be recorded for the information of the external verifier.

8.3 Assess the learner

Assessment can take place in a variety of settings, such as classrooms, lecture rooms, workplaces, community and training establishments or examination halls. However, you should be aware that there are certain conditions that need to be in place to make sure that the assessment is reliable. There are several types of assessment conditions, but the essential point is that the appropriate conditions are used and are applied fairly and consistently to all learners.

In assessments involving observation of practical activities, you should ensure that:

- learners know they are being assessed
- learners know what skills or activities you expect them to demonstrate
- the observation is as unobtrusive as possible
- if questioning is required so more evidence can be gathered, this should be done in a positive and supportive fashion

In assessments involving written questions, you should ensure that learners are:

- given a quiet environment in which to complete the assessment
- all subject to the same time restrictions for the assessment — unless a learner needs extra time as an assessment arrangement
- closely supervised to ensure that there is silence and that no collaboration takes place
- aware of whether they can consult other material, such as dictionaries or online resources, or use calculators

In assessments involving write-ups of work, you should ensure that learners are aware of:

- the level of supervision that will be involved

- The conditions of assessment, ie whether closed or open book
- how much they can confer among themselves
- the resources they can use, such as online resources, dictionaries or calculators

In assessments involving practical activities, you should ensure that learners are aware of:

- how much they can confer among themselves
- the extent to which they can consult other materials or use online resources
- the level of assistance that an assessor can offer

8.4 Provide reasonable assistance

In all assessments, learners must produce evidence that they can meet the requirements of the unit, but it is reasonable to provide clarification if required. There can be a fine line between reasonable assistance and undue support, so assessors and internal verifiers must be very careful that the integrity of the assessment is not compromised. We have given here some examples of reasonable assistance where the learner is not provided with answers to the assessment.

Type of reasonable assistance	**Example and further guidance**
Selection of a task for a practical activity or topic for a case study	Assessor input and advice on the selection of a task/topic is appropriate before the learner actually embarks on the task, unless the unit states the learner has to select the task/topic without assistance. Once work on the assessment has begun, then the learner should be working more autonomously
Advice on alternative sources	If resources for an assessment are unavailable, it may be appropriate for the assessor to discuss a series of options on alternative sources
Clarification	Clarification may be sought by learners because of the wording of a brief or specification. The assessor could discuss the parameters of what would be acceptable.
Exploring options with a learner	A learner is working on a practical activity and is faced with more than one possible solution to a problem. The assessor could ask the learner to discuss each option available and the pros and cons of each and then ask the learner to decide on a solution based on the discussion. In this way the assessor is not telling the learner what to do but is facilitating the thought process to enable the learner to work towards an appropriate choice.
Asking learners to re-read or check something previously covered	A learner is working on a case study, which involves analysing and interpreting and making decisions on the information given. The learner is having difficulty analysing the information in the case study. The assessor may refer the learner back to a previous part of the learning/training programme which covered relevant material or skills that would help in the analysis.

Type of reasonable assistance	Example and further guidance
Drawing out or teasing out points without leading learners	This is broad guidance which lies somewhere between clarification and exploring options. Learners sometimes get stuck at a particular part of a task. In such cases, an assessor could assist by raising other questions that make the learners think about the original problem, so giving them the opportunity to answer their own questions without supplying the actual answers.
Arranging introductions, access, proof of identity	It may be that centre staff will need to set up initial contacts to provide access for a learner to a workplace. For example, learners carrying out a practical assignment need access to a workplace environment. It may be that because of health and safety requirements, the initial approach can only be made by the assessor. He/she may have to set up the initial contact but thereafter all arrangements are made by the learner.
Arranging access to facilities, workshops, specialist equipment	Learners may need access to specific facilities or specialist equipment within the centre. This may have to be arranged by the assessor.
Appropriate supervision	It may be the case that for health and safety reasons etc, an assessor may need to be present when a particular room or piece of equipment is used. This does not mean that the assessor should interfere or offer guidance on the ongoing work the learner is undertaking

8.5 Judge the evidence

As the assessor, you have to decide when to say that the learner has provided enough evidence of sufficient quality to confirm that he or she has reached the required standard.

You must also ensure the authenticity of the learner's work. When you observe learners carrying out assessment activities, you have direct evidence that the work is being done by them and them alone. If you do not see the learner doing an assessment task — for example, a great deal of project work is likely to be carried out without your supervision — you must find ways of ensuring that there have been no instances of plagiarism, copying, collusion or other malpractice. This is particularly the case with learners who carry out tasks in groups. Where learners do work in groups, it is important that you are able to make an accurate assessment of each individual's contribution to the group.

You will find SQA's guidance on dealing with suspected malpractice at www.sqa.org.uk/malpractice. We will discuss some strategies to ensure that the learner's work is their own later in this guide.

Some learners will work quickly while others will take much longer, so your assessment procedures have to be flexible enough to meet the varied capacities and needs of your learners, while not compromising the validity of the assessment. E- assessment could help to reduce the assessment and marking burden, while continuing to offer learners more frequent assessment opportunities.

Learners who take longer to work through a unit or who need to be re-assessed should be assessed only against the standards for the unit, and must not be compared with quicker learners. If all learners achieve competence for a unit assessment, all will pass. There is no requirement to let only a certain number pass, or to try to allocate an order of merit to the group. 'Norm-referenced' or 'norm-related' assessment is not used with SQA qualifications.

Sometimes you have to recognise that competence may not be attainable by all learners — there is a point when you may have to accept that some learners will not be capable of completing a unit. Your centre will have its own guidance on when this point is reached and what you should do to help a learner who has arrived at it.

8.6 Standardisation

Standardisation is an essential part of ensuring the consistency of assessors' judgements. It is essential that all assessors share a common understanding of the standards prior to assessment.

After an assessment has taken place, standardisation exercises should identify any discrepancies between assessors and allow adjustments to be made to remedy these. There are different ways of carrying out standardisation, depending on the nature of the evidence. The internal verifier should ensure that the most appropriate method is used. Here are some examples:

- When the evidence consists of scripts from written tests, double marking allows assessors to review the same learner evidence to check each other's interpretation of the standard. Alternatively, you may wish to divide up the evidence so that the same assessor assesses the same section across all learners. This allows each assessor a better chance to understand and apply associated assessment schemes. In either case you should pay particular attention to borderline decisions.
- When evaluating product evidence, you should consider setting up agreement trials in which assessors consider examples of learner work based on the assessment scheme. By discussing discrepancies, and coming to a shared understanding based on the assessment criteria, a common standard will be applied.
- When assessing performance, practical activities or process skills, you will also need a form of agreement trial, perhaps involving pairs of assessors carrying out dual assessment. Both should initially make independent judgements, and then discuss discrepancies and reach consensus.

In smaller centres, it may be necessary to work with another centre when carrying out these activities. This can be advantageous as it encourages the sharing and dissemination of good practice.

If you have followed the guidance in this section, you should be confident that you have ensured the reliability of your assessment decisions.

8.7 Record your assessment decisions

You must keep records of the assessments you have undertaken with your learners. Record-keeping is necessary because:

- it allows learners' progress to be tracked
- internal and external verifiers will use the records to help them select sample assessment decisions for review

- SQA can use your records when monitoring quality assurance activities in your centre

You may decide, in reviewing the evidence, that there is some part of the evidence that requires re-assessment before you can record your decision. There is more information in the Retention of candidate assessment records table on our website.

8.8 Make opportunities for remediation and re-assessment

Assessment should take place when learners are ready to be assessed. It is the assessor's responsibility to ensure appropriate learning and teaching, and to provide support for learners including opportunities for appropriate consolidation. If there is a minor shortfall or omission in learner evidence, the assessor may clarify this by either requiring a written amendment to by oral questioning. In either case, such instances must be formally noted by the assessor, either in writing or by recording and made available to the internal and external verifier.

Some qualifications may stipulate the conditions in which re-assessment can be carried out, and it is important to abide by these. You should always refer to the unit specification or assessment strategy before starting to make arrangements for re-assessment. If there are no such requirements, our advice is that there should normally be one, or in exceptional circumstances two, re-assessment opportunities. The decision of what constitutes an exceptional circumstance rests with your professional judgement.

You will need to consider whether your learners need to re-take the whole assessment or only part. This will depend on:

- the assessment method that has been used
- the purpose of the assessment

For practical activities and performance, it might not be possible to re-assess only those areas in which the learner has failed to demonstrate competence. If you were to try to do this you would probably fragment the assessment process and would not be able to make a judgement about the learner's actual performance in the assessment activity as a whole.

For written tests designed to identify the learner's knowledge or understanding at a given point in time or as a whole, it might also be necessary to re-assess the whole test. On the other hand, if the learner was producing a portfolio of their best work, they may only have to re-do one piece of work.

Where the evidence is generated over a period of time, such as in a project, it might be valid simply to re-do parts of an assessment. It might, for instance, be feasible for the learner to re-submit the part of the project where there was a problem and for this then to be incorporated into the final submission. It is good practice in the case of such long-term exercises to aim to assess in stages rather than to 'end-load' the process.

This would allow, for example, a poor plan to be identified early on and to be re-drafted without jeopardising the full project.

Where it is possible to isolate an outcome that has not been achieved, it should be possible to re-assess just that single outcome. However, where parts of several outcomes are involved, for example in a combined assessment, it could be simpler and more sensible to present the learner with a completely new assessment.

If a combined assessment has been used, the learner may be required to undertake the whole assessment again to show ability to complete a single complex task. Again, it is good practice to monitor progress and provide feedback on the quality of the learner's work at regular intervals. As well as helping both assessor and learner to monitor progress, it also provides an authentication mechanism by which assessors can ensure that the work produced is the learner's own.

Learners must not be given the same assessments repeatedly or asked identical questions. Alternative assessments must be made available that are materially different — this ensures that the level of demand is not reduced. An assessment cannot be fit for purpose when the level of demand on the resit is different to the original assessment. In some instances, depending on assessment strategy stipulations, you may be required to ensure that learners have not undertaken the assessment recently.

8.9 Record the final result of assessment

Once you have carried out your assessments and have sufficient, relevant, and authentic evidence showing that your learners have met the standards, you are in a position to make and record your final assessment decision. This provides the basis of the results information for certification purposes.

Remember that all internal assessments will be subject to internal verification and external verification. This will ensure that the assessment decisions taken by one assessor in a centre are consistent with the decisions taken by:

- other assessors in the same centre
- other assessors throughout the country

Make sure that you cross-reference evidence for certification back to the mandatory standard. This shows that your assessments meet the standard and presents you with another opportunity of checking that your assessment is valid. There can be no certification if external verifiers are not satisfied that your assessments meet the standard.

8.10 Retention of learner assessment records

SQA requires centres to keep records of learner assessment as these are the basis on which certification is made. The retention time varies according to qualification type. Your assessment records should show:

- a list of learners registered with SQA for each qualification offered in the centre
- details of learner assessment, including the name of the assessor, date and outcome
- internal verification activity
- certificates claimed

Records must be stored securely and in a retrievable format. They must be made available to the external verifier and SQA on request.

There are additional retention requirements relating to internal assessment appeals and malpractice cases. There are full details for each qualification type in our Retention of learner assessment records table.

8.11 Retention of learner assessment evidence

Centres must hold physical evidence of learner assessment for a specific length of time. This retention time varies according to qualification type and evidence type, and whether or not the centre has been selected for external verification.

How learner assessment evidence is held is at the centre's discretion, but it must be stored securely in a retrievable format and be available to the external verifier on request. You will find details on the retention times, and when centres may dispose of actual assessment evidence, in our evidence retention requirements document.

9 Authentication strategies

It is important to ensure that work submitted by a learner is their own. The risk of malpractice is greater when you do not have the opportunity to observe learners carrying out assessment activities. The growth of web companies selling anything from essays to research reports is a particular problem. The use of generative artificial intelligence (AI) is also something that needs to be considered — 'AI' is a label used to describe any type of artificial intelligence that is used to create text, prose, formulae, code, images, video or audio. ChatGPT and Google Gemini are two examples of generative AI tools. AI outputs can be very human-like, potentially increasing the risk of plagiarism.

There are various web-based services that can detect plagiarism, but the following strategies can also be effective in authenticating learners' work:

- questioning
- write-ups under supervised conditions
- witness testimony
- use of personal logs
- personal statements produced by your learners
- peer reports

Written assessments can be designed to be so specific that learners cannot simply download information from the web or copy chunks of text. The use of case studies that require students to include information from their own experience can also help to reduce plagiarism. You should ensure that learners are clear about how to access resources, especially from the internet, how to reference the material they use, and the extent to which they may confer with others or seek support.

It will be helpful for you to record the reasons for the decisions you take on all of these forms of authentication so that you can present these, along with assessment evidence, to the internal and external verifiers.

9.1 Questioning

When you have not been able to see the learners perform activities at first hand, it will be useful to ask them questions about what they did and why they did it. In some cases it may be appropriate to ask them to provide a short presentation of their work, followed by questions. This will help you to be more confident that the work presented to you is their own.

9.2 Write-ups under supervised conditions

Here, learners are given time to research tasks in advance, but they produce a proportion of their assessment work in a supervised environment. Learners are:

- given the task beforehand and are told of any time constraints on the research allocated to the task
- allowed access to prescribed resources
- informed about any restrictions on the notes of their research activities — eg they might be limited to a given number of words or pages
- informed of the time allocations for the write-up for each session

9.3 Logbooks

As well as a useful means of assessing a learner's progress, a personal logbook can help prove authenticity, but it must be regularly inspected by the assessor. The logbook, or blog, should be formally structured, have clear instructions for use, and should give guidance to learners on how essential information is to be recorded.

In the workplace, learners may keep a logbook to monitor and check the operation of specific equipment or to keep a record of processes. Again these records should be scrutinised by the assessor.

9.4 Personal statements

When learners are producing evidence over an extended period of time, you can ask them to maintain a diary, log or blog of the planning, developing and reviewing activities they do in the course of the assessment. This record can be used to note success and problems, and can provide you with a basis for questioning. It can also be used for reflective accounts, which can assist learners to understand their learning.

Some learners, such as those working towards higher-level qualifications, might be comfortable producing personal statements. You must make sure that the evidence you require does not ask for more than is stipulated in the standards for the qualification and does not pose any barriers to learners.

9.5 Witness testimony in vocational qualifications

Witness testimony can be a valuable source of evidence where it has been produced by a reliable witness — the more reliable the witness, the more valuable the evidence.

There are various criteria you should bear in mind as you and your learners identify witnesses to provide testimony. The most reliable kind of witness would:

- be familiar with the national occupational standards and what is required of learners
- know the task and what is expected of employees in the workplace

A witness who can meet both criteria is likely to be the most reliable source of evidence. However, this should not rule out seeking witness testimony from someone who cannot meet all the criteria — at the very least, such individuals will be able to confirm or authenticate that your learners carried out a number of different activities at specified times. However, their witness testimony will be less valuable in what it can tell you about your learners' expertise.

In deciding to use witness testimony, you must ensure that this is valid and practicable. For example, witness testimony can be a useful tool in helping you to authenticate evidence that your learners claim to have produced. However, questioning your learners or asking them to produce personal statements might still be necessary.

Witness testimony should be in an original document, include the witness's signature, the date, details of the witness's relationship to the learner, and, where appropriate, should be presented on headed letter paper. This can help you to confirm that the witness testimony is genuine.

As with all other sources of evidence, the final decision about what the testimony can tell you about your learners' expertise must be taken by the assessor.

Note: SVQ Assessment Strategies often refer to an ‘expert witness’. Assessment Strategies may define the skills, qualities and qualifications that expert witnesses must possess. If you are an assessor for SVQs and need to identify expert witnesses, refer to the Assessment Strategy for your qualification to make sure that you are applying the criteria correctly.

10 Assessment terminology used by SQA

We try to keep the materials we publish straightforward and easy to understand, but you may come across difficult terms from time to time. This glossary might help you as a quick reference — especially if you're just starting out as an assessor — and it might be useful when you're reading material from other organisations.

Accreditation of qualifications: The processes by which the regulatory authorities confirm that a qualification and the associated specification conform to the regulatory criteria.

Achievement: Recognition of an individual's strengths and successes. Wider than formal qualifications.

Agreement trial: A process of standardisation where assessors of the same unit work in a group with the internal verifier to consider examples of learners' work and to reach a shared understanding on applying a common standard.

Answer key: Rubric listing correct responses to test items. Usually used in multiple choice tests. This is related but not similar to a marking scheme, which includes more detailed information about criteria and allocation of marks.

Approval as a centre: The process by which a centre is assessed against criteria for suitability as an SQA approved centre.

Approval to offer a specific qualification: The process by which a centre's resources for offering a particular SQA qualification are assessed against criteria for suitability to offer that qualification.

Assessment: The process of evaluating an individual's learning. Assessment for SQA qualifications involves generating and collecting evidence of a learner's attainment of knowledge, understanding and skills, and judging that evidence against defined standards for formal certification.

Assessment specification: Description of the detailed methods, processes, tasks and criteria to be used to assess the outcome and standards making up a qualification.

Assessment strategy: Method of ensuring quality control for vocational qualifications.

Assessor: The designated person in a centre who is responsible for judging and recording learner evidence.

Attainment: A measure of the accomplishment of the planned areas of the qualification.

Authentication: The process by which a mentor or assessor confirms that an assessment is a learner's own work and that all regulations governing the assessment have been observed.

Awarding: The process through which learners' results and/or grades are determined on the basis of available evidence.

Awarding body: An organisation or consortium which awards qualifications. Awarding bodies must meet the requirements of regulatory bodies.

Blended assessment: An assessment regime which uses multiple approaches to meet the learning outcomes or the unit.

Candidate: The individual entered for an SQA qualification.

Centre: An organisation or consortium accountable to an awarding body for the assessment arrangements leading to a qualification. A centre could, for instance, be an educational institution, training provider or employer, and it may operate across more than one organisation or site.

Centre contact: The person in a centre who is the primary point of contact between the centre and SQA. Usually known as the SQA co-ordinator.

Certificate: The record of attainment in a qualification issued by an awarding body.

Certification: The formal process of crediting candidates with a record of their achievement.

Checklist: A means of recording the judgements made about activities performed by learners.

Closed-book conditions: Under closed-book conditions, no materials other than the assessment instrument are available to candidates. (However, the assessment instrument may contain, for example, a vocabulary list or a data sheet.)

Cognitive competence: The ability to use and apply knowledge and understanding.

Combined assessment: The process of combining assessment for several Units, outcomes or performance criteria into a single coherent activity. It can be used to support flexible delivery, promote integrated learning and assessment, and provide a choice of assessment approaches.

Competence: The possession of skills, and knowledge which meet predetermined standards.

Competence based assessment: An assessment process in which evidence is collected to judge whether fixed performance criteria have been met. Generally used in vocational areas where an assessor works with a learner to collect evidence of competence against the qualification standards.

Core Skills: Discrete, context-free, SQA qualifications for underpinning skills. The five skills are: Communication; Numeracy; Problem Solving; Information and Communication Technology; Working with Others. Each Core Skill is available at levels 2 to 6 of the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF*)*. See our Core Skills web page.

Credibility: A measure of the confidence placed in the results of any assessment.

Criterion referenced assessment: A form of assessment which measures what learners can do against previously defined criteria.

Cut-off score: A score on an assessment which divides candidates into different groups, as pass–fail, qualified–unqualified, A grade–B grade. Some assessments only have one cut-off score (ie pass/fail); others may have several (ie grades).

Diagnostic assessment: Non-accredited assessment used to identify a learner's strengths and weaknesses with a view to providing an appropriate learning programme.

Demand: Measure of a question's cognitive requirements. Demand is normally expressed in terms of a recognised taxonomy. The level of demand in SQA qualifications relates to SCQF levels.

Difficulty: A measure of a question's complexity or obscurity, or the relative (to other questions) probability of a learner answering it correctly. In technical usage, it is sometimes expressed as a numerical value to indicate a proportion of learners who answer it correctly.

Direct evidence: A term used to describe learner performance or product evidence which assessors have witnessed themselves.

Discrimination: An item's potential to differentiate between candidates (ie stronger candidates are more likely to get it correct than weaker candidates).

Distractor: An incorrect response offered as one of the options for a closed/objective question (usually a multiple choice or a multiple response item). Each distractor must be plausible but incorrect in a significant respect.

E-assessment: The use of electronic media in the assessment process. See SQA digital assessment resource.

Element: Qualifications based on National Occupational Standards contain elements in which the competences expressed as **performance criteria** and **evidence requirements** are detailed.

E-portfolio: An electronic portfolio that allows learners to store digital artefacts and streamlines the process of review and verification for learners, assessors and verifiers.

Equitable and fair: SQA principle of assessment ensuring that there are no unnecessary barriers to assessment in the specification of skills, knowledge and understanding or the development of the assessment.

E-verification: Use of technology to support remote verification of assessment materials and learner evidence.

Evidence: Materials provided by a learner as proof of his or her competence against specified performance criteria.

Evidence requirements: State what learners have to do, to what standard, and how much evidence they have to produce to demonstrate that they have achieved the outcome. The evidence requirements detail the full breadth of achievement of knowledge and/or skills required, the sampling required, and how evidence is to be produced.

Expert witness: a person who is occupationally competent in a learner's area of work and who probably sees the learner working on a daily basis — more often than the assessor does. The expert witness is able to make a judgement about competence in a particular job activity, but it is still the role of the assessor to incorporate these judgements into the final assessment decision for the qualification. Expert witnesses are particularly used in Scottish Vocational Qualifications. Assessment strategies refer to them and specifically define the role they are expected to perform.

External verification: The process of ensuring that national standards are being maintained consistently across all centres.

External verifier: A person appointed by SQA who is responsible for the quality assurance of a centre's provision and for ensuring that standards of assessment are applied uniformly and consistently across centres. An external verifier is often appointed on a subject area basis or for a verification group of units.

Feedback: Qualitative information about their performance given to learners after an assessment. Unlike a grade, feedback is explicitly developmental, ie orientated towards further progress on the part of the learner. Feedback is particularly important in formative assessment, when no final grade will be given. Feedback may include a correct or model response and an explanation of any incorrect responses made by the learner.

Formative assessment: Assessment providing developmental feedback to a learner so that they can adjust their plan for future learning. It is not recorded for external purposes. Formative assessment is often called 'Assessment for learning'.

Graded unit: Assessment in the form of a project or examination for Higher National Certificates and Diplomas designed to demonstrate that the learner has achieved the principal aims of the group award and is able to integrate the knowledge and expertise gained from the other units. It is also used to grade learners.

Group award: A combination of units gathered together to form a coherent qualification.

Indirect evidence: Something that someone other than the assessor has observed or said about the learner. Corroboration is required for indirect evidence.

Internal assessment: An assessment for an SQA qualification which is carried out within the institution delivering the programme of learning. Internal assessment should always be internally verified and is subject to external verification.

Internal quality assurance: The process of ensuring that the provision at centre and subject level conforms to the approved procedures and that consistency is being achieved within the centre.

Internal verification: The process of ensuring that standards of assessment for SQA qualifications are applied uniformly and consistently within a centre. See Internal Verification: A Guide for Centres.

Internal verifier: A staff member appointed by the centre who ensures that assessors apply standards of assessment uniformly and consistently.

Item: The smallest component of an assessment, such as a question or task.

Item bank: A storage facility for items that allows them to be maintained and used for test generation purposes.

Key: The correct response for a closed/objective item (usually a multiple choice or multiple response item).

Learner: Someone who is following a course of study at a school, college of further education, with a training provider, or through an employer.

Learning and Development SVQs: Qualifications designed to approve the quality and rigour of assessment. They are required by anyone delivering government-funded training and learning programmes.

Malpractice: 'Malpractice' includes maladministration and non-compliance and means any action (or inaction) that could compromise the integrity of SQA qualifications. All allegations of malpractice will be investigated robustly, fairly and impartially.

Mark: The smallest component of credit that can be given in a marking scheme.

Marking scheme: Details of how marks are to be awarded in relation to a particular assessment task. A marking scheme normally indicates the number of marks each question or component of the task attracts. It should also indicate acceptable answers or criteria for awarding marks.

Mentor: A person who carries out, either singly or in combination, the functions of advising a learner, collecting evidence of his or her competence on behalf of the assessor and authenticating the work learners have undertaken.

Meta skills: Meta-skills are transferable behaviours and abilities. There are three broad categories of meta-skills - **Self-management** (focusing, integrity, adapting, initiative). **Social intelligence** (communicating, feeling, collaborating, leading) and **Innovation** (curiosity, creativity, sense-making, critical thinking.)

Method of assessment: A means of generating evidence of a learner's knowledge and/or skills.

Model answer: An exemplar response to an item.

National Occupational Standards (NOS): National standards of competence drawn up by sector skills councils.

Norm-related assessment: A form of assessment which compares learners' performances with those of other learners but is not used with SQA qualifications.

Norm-referenced assessment: A form of assessment which compares learners' performances with those of a control group, but is not used with SQA qualifications.

Observation: A method of assessment in which the learner is observed carrying out tasks that reflect the performance criteria given in outcomes.

Outcomes: Statements that define the products of learning. They describe the activities the learner has to perform to achieve a National or Higher National Unit and contain evidence requirements and information on assessment.

Pass mark: The minimum score in a graded assessment required to achieve the lowest 'pass' grade in the range. May also be used in a minimum competence test for the minimum score for which a pass award will be given.

Performance criteria: Statements that describe the standard to which learners must perform the activities that are stated in the outcome or element in vocational qualifications

Plagiarism: learners using the work of others and passing it off as their own for assessment purposes.

Portfolio: A representative collection of a learner's work, usually assembled over the period of the learning, to demonstrate or exemplify either that a range of criteria has been met, or to showcase a learner's best work.

Positive marking: A system of marking where marks are awarded for what is correct rather than deducted for what is wrong.

Practicable: An SQA principle of assessment. A valid and reliable assessment may not be practicable due to the resources or time required to carry it out efficiently and effectively.

Practical competence: The ability to perform manual and/or behavioural tasks.

Process: The skills, procedures and/or thought processes displayed during an assessment activity.

Product: Something the learner makes or does, as part of an assessment activity, as defined in the outcome or outcomes.

Product evaluation: A method of assessment that enables the quality of a product produced by the learner, rather than the process of producing it, to be evaluated.

Quality assurance system: Any system at local, regional and national level that promotes confidence in a qualification by guaranteeing the maintenance of standards.

Question type: The nature of the question, usually categorised by the way learners give their answer rather than the content of the question.

Range statement: A statement in Vocational Qualification Units which specifies the different contexts in which the activities described in the performance criteria have to be demonstrated. Where they appear, range statements are mandatory.

Recognition of prior learning (RPL): A process that enables an individual to receive formal recognition through certification of prior learning, training or experience.

Reliability: An SQA principle of assessment. The extent to which assessment results are consistent from one learner to the next, and from one assessor to the next and from one occasion to the next, for example with a different assessor. A measure of the accuracy of the score achieved, if another test from a bank of ostensibly equivalent items is used.

Remediation: The process of providing learners with additional learning/teaching support before allowing them to be re-assessed.

Rubric: A set of instructions provided as the preamble to an assessment.

Scenario: An abbreviated case study or history which can be used as part of an assessment.

Score: The total marks achieved by a learner on a test.

Sector skills councils: Government-sponsored industry councils made up of trade bodies, employers and specialists.

Self-assessment: A judgement a learner makes about his/her work or level of attainment in relation to the stated learning outcomes for the activity/programme. Self-assessment is generally used to develop the individual's ability to think critically about his/her learning.

Simulation: Any structured assessment exercise involving the organisation and achievement of a specific task which seeks to reproduce real-life situations.

Simulations are used where assessment is difficult to carry out, eg for safety reasons.

Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF): A framework explaining the relationship between different types of Scottish qualifications by comparing them in terms of level of difficulty.

Skills for Learning, Life and Work: Generic skills that are developed throughout SQA National Qualifications. The skills are Literacy, Numeracy, Health & Wellbeing, Employability, Enterprise and Citizenship and Thinking Skills. There's more information on our Skills for Learning, Life and Work web page.

Standard: The criteria for success at a particular level. A predetermined national level of attainment for SQA certification.

Standardisation: Processes to check, adjust and ensure that assessment processes and criteria (including both the administration of the assessment itself, and its marking) are applied consistently by assessors, examiners and verifiers. Standardisation can be carried out within centres as well as by awarding bodies.

Subjective errors: Shortcomings in the interpretation of learner performance which arise from the personal judgement of the assessor.

Summative assessment: Assessment, generally undertaken at the end of a learning activity or programme of learning, which is used to make a judgement on the learner's overall attainment. A key purpose of summative assessment is to record, and often grade, the learner's performance in relation to the stated learning objectives of the programme.

Supervision: the oversight of unit internal assessment, ensuring that the learners' work is authentically their own. Individuals who have been involved in the teaching of the unit may act as supervisors but must not interfere or offer guidance on the ongoing assessment.

Test specification: The detailed requirements of what a test must contain, in terms of duration, type and quantity of questions, number of marks, spread of curriculum topics, rules for sampling etc. The test specification is used as the reference guide by a test setter.

Unit: The basis of the majority of SQA's qualification system. Each unit is a qualification in its own right and also acts as a building block for specific qualifications.

Unit specification: The statement of standards and guidance that is the basis of certification for National and Higher National Qualifications.

Validation: SQA quality assurance process to ensure that all new and revised qualifications are coherent, meet the needs of users and that SQA units are technically well written. It is sometimes referred to as 'subject validation'.

Validity: An SQA principle of assessment. A measure of the accuracy of an assessment. This means that the assessment is appropriate for its purpose, has been designed to allow learners to show that they have the required knowledge, understanding and skills to meet the standards of the qualification and that any interpretation and use of the assessment results are supported and can be justified.

Verification: The process of ensuring that quality assurance systems are being maintained. Verification can be either internal or external.

Verification group: A grouping of similar SQA units, eg Computing, Mechanical Engineering, for external verification purposes.