



**National Qualifications Units**

**Qualification Verification Summary Report 2018**

**Core Skills: Communication**

## Introduction

This report covers external qualification verification of NQ Core Skills: Communication units during session 2017–18. External verifiers visited various centres including colleges, private training providers and community learning centres across Scotland.

The units listed below were verified.

F3GM 08	Communication: Listening (SCQF level 2)
F3GN 08	Communication: Reading (SCQF level 2)
F3GP 08	Communication: Speaking (SCQF level 2)
F3GR 08	Communication: Writing (SCQF level 2)
F3GM 09	Communication: Listening (SCQF level 3)
F3GN 09	Communication: Reading (SCQF level 3)
F3GP 09	Communication: Speaking (SCQF level 3)
F3GR 09	Communication: Writing (SCQF level 3)
F3GB 08	Core Skills: Communication (SCQF level 2)
F3GB 09	Core Skills: Communication (SCQF level 3)
F3GB 10	Core Skills: Communication (SCQF level 4)
F3GB 11	Core Skills: Communication (SCQF level 5)
F3GB 12	Core Skills: Communication (SCQF level 6)

## Category 2: Resources

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

In more than a few centres, elements of the quality management system are subject to formal scheduled reviews including the internal verification policy, standardisation meetings, learning equipment and resources. Assessment environments are reviewed against site selection checklists. Pre-delivery checklists and standardisation meetings were sometimes used to confirm that assessment instruments were appropriate for use, and to review learning and assessment materials.

Sometimes internal verifiers and assessors discussed assessment instruments and assessment approaches informally. In these cases, centres would benefit from a more formal approach to review. In all centres where assessment was community-based and individualised, the review of learning environments etc takes place constantly.

## **Category 3: Candidate support**

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

Across centres a range of methods were used to assess candidates for their suitability for the programmes (eg initial interviews, information from referral agencies and online diagnostic tools). Almost all centres had clear statements on how candidates with additional needs would be supported, if appropriate, and made use of individual training plans.

In colleges, although prior achievement was taken into account when considering the level of Communication for which the learner was entered, candidates mainly undertook the level that was expected for their vocational course. In more than a few cases, learners who already had the expected level were encouraged to undertake the next level. In all colleges, where additional candidates' needs were identified, candidates were referred to specialist support teams.

In more than a few cases where centres worked with learners who did not have formal qualifications, informal questioning of candidates to garner information about prior qualifications took place in conjunction with diagnostic exercises. SQA Enquirer and SQA Connect were used to ascertain candidates' prior qualifications and Core Skills profiles.

In all community learning centres, candidates were supported individually to select the level of assessment and choose from 10 or 40 hour Core Skills units.

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

In community-based learning centres, delivery and assessment was on a one-to-one basis, ensuring regular contact between assessor and candidate and allowing candidates to work at their own pace.

In most private training providers, delivery and assessment was carried out in small groups allowing assessors to have quality time with candidates.

In all colleges, candidates had scheduled classes during which progress was regularly reviewed. Scheduled contact was evidenced from class registers and assessment timetables.

Almost all centres used formative work to build candidates' confidence before completing summative tasks.

## **Category 4: Internal assessment and verification**

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

In almost all cases, comprehensive internal verification procedures are described in centres' quality manuals, including lists of responsibilities of the co-ordinators, assessors and internal verifiers. One centre used spreadsheets maintained by co-ordinators to track internal verification and confirm sample sizes.

Timing of internal verification varied, for example at the mid-point and at the end; as soon as possible after assessment was completed; or on demand. Some larger centres operated a three-year rolling programme of internal verification, which appeared to be working effectively. Sampling practices also varied across centres with most having a sampling policy based on risk.

In many cases, all subject assessors and internal verifiers attended regular standardisation meetings with standing agenda items. In one centre, each meeting had a specific focus (spotlight) to allow the team to examine particular aspects in depth. Another centre used an approach called Group Review involving Peers (GRiP), involving full participation from all appropriate staff at the three stages of verification — pre-delivery, ongoing and post-delivery.

Most centres gave formal feedback on the internal verification process through detailed and constructive comments on internal verification documents. In more than a few cases, feedback was offered informally.

In a few instances, despite well designed internal verification systems, procedures had not ensured consistent standardisation of assessment, impacting on 4.3 and 4.6.

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

Across almost all centres, there was sufficient evidence of valid instruments of assessment and a variety of approaches being undertaken. Most centres used approaches modelled on the Core Skills: Communication assessment support packs and contextualised assessment tasks to suit the needs of cohorts of candidates or candidates' life experiences.

Most centres with multiple campuses had undertaken considerable work in standardising approaches across the whole centre and were making good progress. However, in a few cases, there were discrepancies between different approaches and paperwork, therefore in these centres standardisation was still a work in progress.

In almost all cases, Reading and Understanding tasks utilised up-to-date assessment texts. However, in a few centres Reading and Understanding assessments gave cause for concern.

- ◆ In one case, a task drew on the approach from a 1998 pack and another was matched to the pre-2009 specification. Both were invalid.

- ◆ Some centres did not have robust marking guides or worked solutions to ensure consistency of judgement between assessors. Not all assessors were completing assessment checklists.
- ◆ In a few cases, responses to the evaluation of the Reading and Understanding text lacked sufficient evaluation of language.
- ◆ In more than a few cases, there was an unnecessary focus on identifying purpose and intended audience. These do not have to be identified and justified by the candidates, as they used to be. However, candidates do need to know the purpose and audience to be able to evaluate.
- ◆ The length of Reading and Understanding text for Task 1 was, on more than a few occasions, excessive. This represents over-assessment.

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

In a few centres plagiarism and malpractice were explained concisely with clear examples. One centre used a PowerPoint presentation for students explaining 'The SQA and Academic Regulations' to demystify the jargon and made responsibilities in terms of assessment very clear.

Almost all centres asked candidates to sign a checklist to confirm that they had been advised of plagiarism and were aware of its implications. On more than a few occasions, these were not signed. Learners uploading assessment evidence via Moodle were required to confirm formally that it was their own work.

In almost all cases, the retention of drafts within candidates' folders provided further evidence of authenticity. In a very few cases centres used electronic means of plagiarism detection, eg Turnitin.

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

In almost all centres, assessment decisions were consistent with the level of the awards.

Many centres presented detailed assessment checklists as suitable evidence of achievement of Task 3 Speaking and Listening and had some video or audio recorded materials. One centre used 'Clickview' to share video recordings of Speaking and Listening assessments for other assessors to view, to aid standardisation. Though in a few cases evidence of achievement for Speaking and Listening was minimal.

In a small number of cases minor inconsistencies in assessment marking arose due to a lack of marking guides for the Reading and Understanding tasks, and not all staff were using assessment checklists to confirm achievement.

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

In almost all centres, evidence had been retained as requested for external verification events and centres' retention policies were consistent with SQA requirements. In a few cases candidate evidence was retained for significantly longer periods due to audit requirements of other awarding organisations or funding bodies.

In one case candidate evidence from the date of notification of an external verification visit until the visit itself had not been retained, as per SQA quality requirements.

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

Most centres had formal policies on dissemination of visiting verification reports. SQA co-ordinators usually provided information to staff following external verification visits. In most cases staff discussed feedback at standardisation meetings. Issues raised would be written into action plans and dealt with accordingly. In more than a few instances, reports were uploaded to shared drives to which all staff have access.

In a few cases all relevant staff were invited to the external verifier feedback session to hear the feedback first hand.

## **Areas of good practice reported by qualification verifiers**

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

- ◆ Ongoing work to identify an appropriate diagnostic tool that best fits learners' and assessors' needs.
- ◆ Community-based candidates and assessors jointly made decisions regarding the nature and level of assessments, considering development needs and prior achievements.
- ◆ Class schedules with overviews of assessment timing.
- ◆ Building candidates' confidence in their Communication skills through the process of careful and incremental formative work, evidenced in individual learning plans.
- ◆ Standardisation meetings with a specific focus (spotlight) to allow the team to examine particular aspects in depth.
- ◆ The use of Turnitin as an electronic means of plagiarism detection for written assessments.
- ◆ Thoughtful, relevant and personalised feedback given to learners.
- ◆ The use of 'Clickview' to share video recordings of candidates doing Speaking and Listening assessments with other assessors, to aid standardisation.
- ◆ Clear written statements on how the centre will retain different types of evidence depending on whether the qualifications have been selected for external verification, with additional supporting evidence relating to archiving, security and file management.

## **Specific areas for development**

The following areas for development were reported during session 2017–18:

- ◆ Standardisation and review meetings to be formally scheduled at least annually using the wording of criterion 2.4 to consider teaching/learning resources, review support materials, classroom environments, IT requirements etc.
- ◆ More detailed and constructive comments on internal verification documents.
- ◆ In smaller centres, a more rigorous approach to internal verification and standardisation with subject specialist meetings to build consistency and confidence in assessment design and to review and refresh assessment instruments. The SQA prior verification service might provide a useful mechanism for building confidence in Communication assessment design.
- ◆ Use of the Understanding Standards website for benchmarking different levels and examining evidence from borderline candidates across all Core Skills: Communication tasks.
- ◆ Standardisation meetings to be held at least once a year, looking at learner evidence to allow assessors to standardise their judgements, review appropriateness of assessments and air opinions.
- ◆ Achieving greater standardisation in the assessment of Reading and Understanding tasks. Candidates need to identify the main ideas and supporting detail of the document, then provide an evaluation of it in terms of purpose and needs of intended readers, only. The need for separate questions on purpose and intended readership constitutes over-

assessment. (Planning sheets within ASPs ask candidates questions on purpose and readership only to support evaluation.)

- ◆ Where there is no video/audio recording of Task 3 Speaking and Listening assessment, additional papers should be retained, eg planning notes, cue cards, PowerPoint slides and detailed observation checklists, so there is enough evidence for an internal or external verifier to confirm evidence requirements have been met. Duration of the Speaking and Listening event should always be noted.
- ◆ Assessors and internal verifiers should visit the SQA Understanding Standards website to view the new exemplar materials for Speaking and Listening to aid future standardisation.
- ◆ Consistent use of assessment checklists to confirm whether candidates are producing work that is consistent with the evidence requirements.
- ◆ Team review of QVSR reports for 2016 and 2017, especially for points raised regarding Reading and Writing assessment. The QVSR reports can be found in the [Core Skills web pages](#).