



**Scottish Vocational Qualifications
Higher National and Graded Units**

**Qualification Verification Summary Report 2019
Horticulture**

Introduction

In academic session 2018–19, external verifiers visited 13 centres for SVQs covering the following awards:

GH7E 23 SVQ Parks, Gardens and Green Space at SCQF level 6
GH7C 23 SVQ Landscaping at SCQF level 6
GH79 22 SVQ Horticulture at SCQF level 5
GH7A 22 SVQ Landscaping at SCQF level 5
GH7D 22 SVQ Parks, Gardens and Green Space at SCQF level 5
G9HV 21 SVQ Horticulture at SCQF level 4

Six of the centres visited were Scottish further education colleges, two were local authorities and five were private training providers.

One centre was visited for the HN award HNC Horticulture. The visit looked at the following units:

F2IT 34 Plant Growth and Development
F1JK 34 Plant Retailing
F21S 34 Plant Recognition and Use
F2B3 34 Plant Protection
F1JG 35 Parks, Gardens and Public Open Spaces
H7B5 35 Advanced Plant Propagation

Central verification was also carried out for two centres covering three exam-based graded units as follows:

H7L1 34 HNC Horticulture Graded Unit 1
H7L6 35 HND Garden Design Graded Unit 3
H7L3 35 HND Horticulture Graded Unit 3

All visits and central verification resulted in a high confidence rating. While there are no main points for action, there were a number of recommendations resulting from the visits.

Category 2: Resources

Criterion 2.1: Assessors and internal verifiers must be competent to assess and internally verify, in line with the requirements of the qualification.

For SVQ provision, all assessors and verifiers held appropriate technical qualifications for the assessment and verification of the awards. In most centres, staff were qualified to HND or degree level. Almost all had the appropriate assessor/verifier awards with the remaining few working towards them. The assessors and verifiers had a wide range of practical experience including from local authorities, the National Trust, landscape companies and nurseries and garden centres.

All assessors and verifiers had assessment and/or verification roles detailed in their job descriptions and most have many years of experience in carrying out assessment and verification.

In all centres, staff CVs and up-to-date continuing professional development (CPD) records were available. All staff had access to CPD through their centre and almost all had undertaken some relevant CPD in the last year. The CPD included a range of subject specific CPD such as a propagation techniques workshop and battery-operated machine training. Most also attended a relevant industry event such as the LANTRA conference, Trellis conference or Gardening Scotland.

Most staff also undertook more general CPD such as GDPR and safeguarding updates. Some centres also had examples of CPD of specific relevance to their candidate groups, for example supporting looked-after vulnerable persons and the NCFE certificate in Working with Individuals with Learning Difficulties.

A few centres had a series of general CPD opportunities offered online to staff. Almost all staff had undertaken visits to relevant places such as gardens, nurseries, garden centres — including Pentland Plants, Reynards and Four Oaks nursery.

In the few centres that had new staff, there were good induction and support mechanisms for new members of staff.

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

All centres carried out reviews of material and resources on a regular basis. Most units were subject to a pre-delivery check in accordance with the centre quality procedures. Some had made changes to their assessment materials since the last verification visit to ensure they were much more closely related to the National Occupational Standards (NOS) than before.

Where centres use sites other than their own for assessment of practical work, there were formal agreements or a lease in place and appropriate site selection checklists were completed. All centres carried out practical work on suitable sites and were well resourced for delivery and assessment of the awards.

While most centres' review of assessment materials ensures they are matched to the NOS, there were a few where improvements were needed, for example where the practical observation checklists required to be expanded to allow the inclusion of more candidate-specific information.

Almost all HN units verified had been subject to prior verification.

Category 3: Candidate support

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

Most centres recruit candidates directly for the programmes while a few centres are sent candidates by employers to attend on a day release basis. There is a range of mechanisms in place in centres to ensure candidates are matched to the appropriate qualification and level. Some centres offer taster days where candidates can find out more about the programmes, others have formal interviews to identify the expectations and needs of individual candidates.

In some centres, candidates are automatically given Core Skills testing as part of the entry process while others carry it out at the start of the programme.

Where candidates are sent from employers, a few of the centres are involved in the recruitment process in partnership with the employer.

A few centres offer SVQ Level 1 to their local schools and most of these are involved in the selection of candidates, often through 'taster days'.

All centres have a mechanism in place to identify candidates who require additional support for learning. This can include referral from a third-party agency, in their college application or as part of the interview or induction process. All centres provide support to their candidates as required. The nature of support varies according to the centre and the candidate needs but can include readers, scribes or adapted instruments of assessment.

A few centres provided an exceptionally high level of individual support for their candidates which included one-to-one working and provision of support staff. Where candidates were from schools or employers they also had a role in candidate support, including the provision of an allocated mentor or workplace supervisor.

Some centres also offer additional support to candidates in the form of additional qualifications required for working in some aspect of the industry including the Construction Skills Certificate Scheme (CSCS) or PA1 and PA6 qualifications in pesticide application to enable them to be competent at applying pesticides.

During discussion with candidates at verification visits, all candidates commented on the high level of support they received from the centre and from individual assessors.

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

Almost all centres had a relatively small number of candidates and the contact with the assessor was more than sufficient for delivery and assessment of the awards. The number of hours a candidate spent with their assessor varied according to the mode of attendance: day release, block release or full time. Where candidates were from schools or employers, all centres had a

mechanism for ensuring they were also kept up to date with their candidate progress either by meetings or the sharing of reports.

All centres had a process in place for assessment planning with the individual candidate and these were reviewed on an ongoing basis. With employed candidates, these usually take the form of a meeting between the assessor, candidate and their manager to discuss progress, consider resource needs and plan work. Where candidates are assessed on their employer's site, almost all candidates say that they are given plenty of notice of visits and are able to prepare for them.

Almost all portfolios included tracking sheets to enable candidates to monitor their progress.

Category 4: Internal assessment and verification

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

All centres have an internal verification policy in place and in almost all cases this was comprehensive and had been reviewed recently. In almost all centres, candidates' work had been internally verified effectively in accordance with this policy. In a few centres there were examples where the internal verifier had not identified errors within the candidate evidence.

In almost all centres, the policy states that assessments undergo a pre-delivery check and units of the award are internally verified a minimum of once every three years.

All centres have standard internal verification pro formas which were used to record the results of internal verification.

All centres have records of standardisation meetings to ensure consistency of assessment practice. In some centres standardisation meetings take place on a regular basis, while in others standardisation forms part of a wider meeting agenda. In smaller centres this can be informal and recorded in a log rather than with formal minutes.

Centres used a range of methods for recording standardisation discussions including a 'change to assessment' folder, a 'record of discussion' log or formal action minutes to record any relevant changes.

Formal observation of live practical assessment took place at a few centres with most centres having informal observation due to team teaching or close working. Where formal observation of assessment took place, observation reports were completed and included constructive feedback to promote standardisation and reflective practice.

In a few centres there were some minor inaccuracies within the candidates' portfolios of evidence which hadn't been picked up in internal verification, including some missing details such as dates and signatures.

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

There is a wide range of assessment instruments used for assessment of the awards across centres. The most common are assessor observation checklists and underpinning knowledge questions but many centres provide additional supporting evidence such as photographs, identification tests, log books, personal statements, witness testimonies, propagation logs and records of work. In the majority of centres all assessment instruments are clearly cross-referenced to the LANTRA NOS.

Some of the less common assessment instruments used to good effect included candidate reflection on their personal image for unit H515 04 Establish and Maintain Workplace Relationships.

Where possible, the majority of centres use opportunities to integrate practical assessments for more than one unit to avoid duplication of work. In a few centres the number of pieces of evidence was very high, or the assessor observation checklists overly detailed, and it was suggested that assessors should consider reducing this.

Almost all centres use a portfolio-based approach where all assessment materials are gathered together. In almost all visits the portfolios were well laid out with clear cross-referencing. There were a few centres where minor changes to the assessment were suggested, for example the assessor observation checklists would have benefitted from quantities being added. For H52F 04 Install Land Drainage a measure of the actual length of drain installed would be beneficial, as would the square meterage of paths completed for H50K 04 Install Paths and Surfaces.

Some candidates used ICT to record answers to underpinning knowledge questions and improve their ICT skills. A few centres still used cutting scores in knowledge questions as part of their feedback mechanism for employers.

A few centres had a generic evidence section in the portfolio where items common to a number of units were kept, for example tool identification, plant profiles and pest/disease recognition.

All centres had written (including scribed) underpinning knowledge questions and in some cases the candidates would have benefitted from the use of alternative assessment instruments such as oral recording.

In Higher National units the assessment instruments included short answer questions, projects, practical assignments and assessor observation checklists. In all units the instrument of assessment was appropriate for use and covered the outcomes of the unit.

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

All centres had candidate information on malpractice, including plagiarism, which was available either as a written statement or a statement available on the VLE. In all centres plagiarism and malpractice are covered as part of the candidate induction process.

In almost all centres it was clear that work was that of the individual candidates. Practical work is mainly covered by assessor observation checklists and the majority of candidates' work was hand written with a small amount clearly annotated as scribed.

While candidates' individual pieces of work are signed, some centres do not include a signed statement of authenticity in all candidates' portfolios. In one case the standard pro forma confirming the authenticity of work, which was available in the internal verification pack, had not been completed.

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

At all centres the underpinning knowledge questions completed by candidates were marked and signed by the assessor. In most cases candidates were given feedback on their knowledge answers which was constructive and remediation provided an appropriate level of guidance to candidates where necessary. In a few centres candidates would have benefitted from more detailed feedback on their written answers and practical work. The answers given by candidates were, in almost all cases, good or very good and appropriate for the level of study.

For all HN units, including graded units, detailed marking schemes were provided and had been used effectively in making assessment judgements. For exam-based graded units, all centres carried out double marking on the scripts.

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

The materials requested during visit planning were made available at all centres on the day of the visit. All centres have a policy on the retention of materials for the purpose of internal and external verification and this had been implemented. All centre staff were aware of the SQA policy in relation to retention of evidence for quality assurance purposes. In reality many centres retain portfolios with assessment evidence well beyond the SQA required date for other audit purposes.

An increasing number of centres hold master packs containing assessment materials for the awards electronically on drives that only staff have access to. In all centres the portfolios and assessment materials were held securely in either locked cupboards or areas only staff had access to.

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

In all Scottish further education college centres visited the responsibility for dissemination of feedback, including external verification reports, lies within a quality unit. The staff in the quality unit are responsible for circulating the verification reports to relevant managers and assessors/verifiers. The reports are then discussed at a section, team or course meeting and actions agreed. In other centres the reports are circulated, usually by the SQA co-ordinator or head of centre, to relevant staff for discussion and action.

In all centres previous reports were available, either as a paper copies in an SQA folder or electronically on a shared drive or SharePoint site. In a few centres the SQA folder also included copies of a range of notifications from SQA should staff wish to refer to it.

Almost all recommendations resulting from previous visits had been addressed in this session's reports confirming that actions resulting from visits had been addressed. Staff who were interviewed as part of the verification visits were also able to confirm they were aware of any issues raised and the actions required resulting from the previous visit.

Areas of good practice reported by qualification verifiers

The following good practice was reported during session 2018–19:

- ◆ Close liaison with employers in the selection of candidates.
- ◆ High level of candidate support from centres.
- ◆ The standard of candidate knowledge evidence.

Specific areas for development

The following areas for development were reported during session 2018–19:

- ◆ CPD was not always recorded effectively.
- ◆ Revision of assessment materials was required to include more candidate-specific information or more specific details, for example quantities.
- ◆ Effectiveness of the internal verification process.