



COVID 19: Making assessment judgements for SQA Advanced Certificates, SQA Advanced Diplomas, HNDs, NC and NPA qualifications

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Contents

About this guide	1
Current context and the need for a different approach	1
1 Making assessment judgements	3
1.1 Deciding how to proceed for each candidate	3
1.2 Authentication strategies	5
1.3 Approach for Graded Units	5
1.4 Retention of candidate evidence	5
2 Quality assurance	6
2.1 Internal quality assurance	6
2.2 External quality assurance	6
3 Resulting and certification	7
Assessment appeals	7
Appendix 1: Professional Discussion Form	8
Appendix 2: Professional discussion guideline	9

About this guide

This guide is for SQA approved centres out with the UK who offer SQA Advanced Certificates, SQA Advanced Diplomas, HNDs, NC and NPA qualifications.

This guide does not cover PDAs, SVQs or other SQA qualifications.

It explains how we will manage the assessment, quality assurance and certification of candidates who require certification by end of August 2020. For those candidates who require certification after this date, we will provide a further update in early August.

Current context and the need for a different approach

Because of the COVID-19 outbreak, many of our approved centres are closed or operating remotely, so we need to adapt ways to review candidates work to deliver the results that are expected by August 2020.

We recognise that candidate assessment evidence may be incomplete. Candidates may not have had the opportunity to generate evidence for all the units that make up their group award in the usual way. Assessors and internal verifiers working remotely may not currently be able to make positive assessment judgements about candidate achievement as they usually would.

During these unprecedented times we have been working in partnership with our approved centres and other key stakeholders to build on our shared commitment to recognise candidate achievement in as fair a way as possible. To do this, there will need to be flexibility in approaches to ongoing assessment (where this is possible and practicable).

To support ongoing assessment and certification of candidates who are currently undertaking SQA Advanced Certificates, SQA Advanced Diplomas, HNDs, NCs or NPAs, we have agreed an adapted model for internal unit assessment decisions. This guide sets out how your centre should approach unit assessment. We also describe the quality assurance measures that will confirm the validity and reliability of the assessment outcomes.

Any restrictions on movement bring huge challenges to us all, but many centres have developed resourceful and creative ways to support their staff and candidates. We ask, that wherever possible, candidates continue to engage in learning, teaching and assessment until the scheduled end of block/semester, or to the point where your centre considers that enough evidence is in place to enable a final assessment judgement to be made.

In these challenging times, we recognise that not all candidates will achieve their award. If a candidate does not have enough evidence to achieve their award, and cannot generate it, it is important your centre considers keeping the candidate's entry open and providing them with the opportunity to engage in further learning, teaching and assessment when conditions

allow. This may arise (for example) where a candidate has undertaken only a small proportion of the qualification, resulting in unit requirements not being achieved.

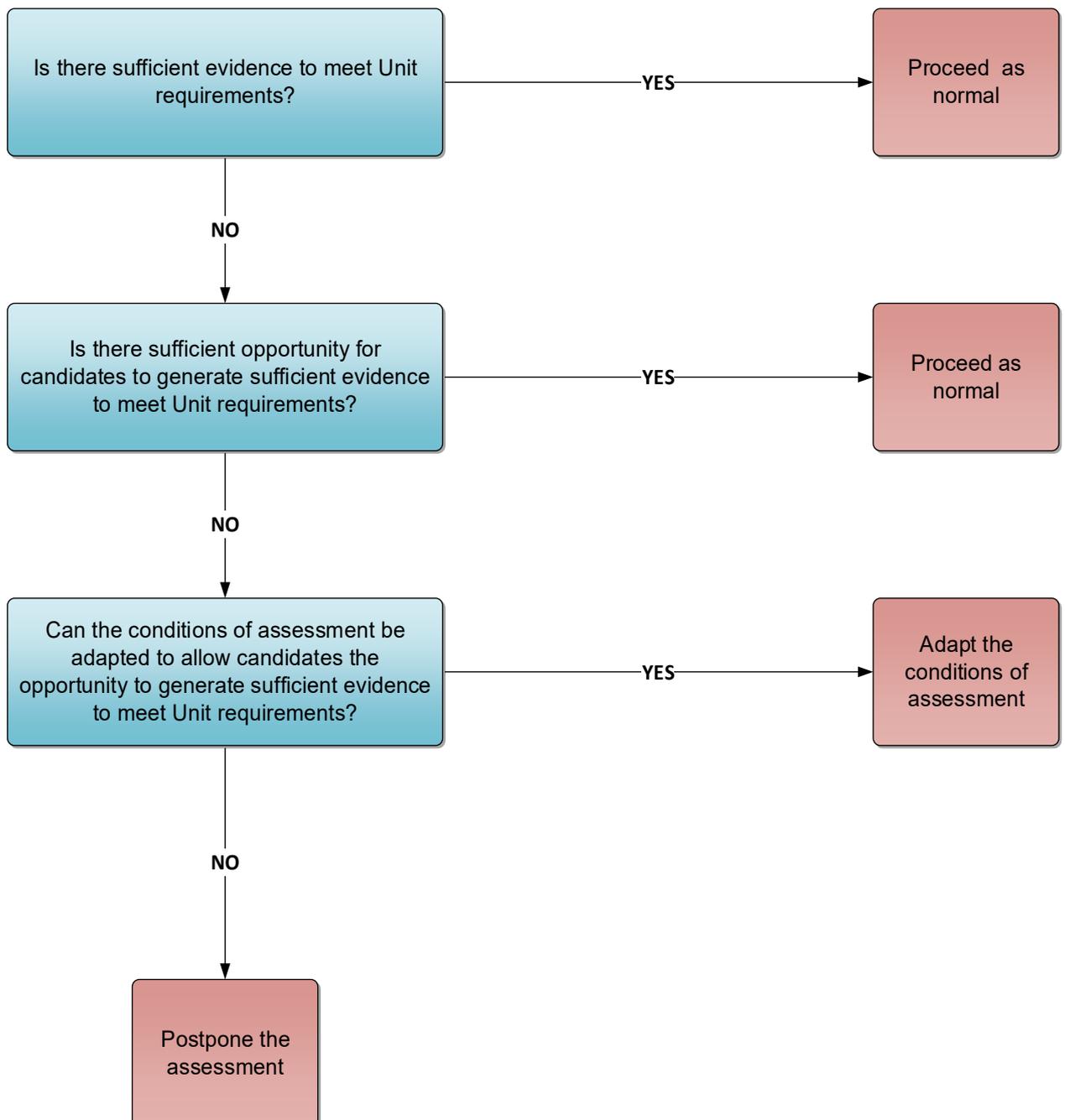
1 Making assessment judgements

1.1 Deciding how to proceed for each candidate

When considering arrangements for each candidate it is important that you follow the steps shown here:



Making assessment judgements (Contingency for COVID19)



Circumstance 1: Evidence is complete

If candidates generated enough evidence under normal conditions to meet the unit requirements, and this has been confirmed by your usual internal quality assurance mechanisms, results should be processed as normal.

Circumstance 2: Evidence is incomplete but can be generated under normal conditions

If enough evidence to meet the unit requirements has not yet been generated, but there is still an opportunity for candidates to generate it under normal conditions, assessment should proceed as normal.

Circumstance 3: Evidence is incomplete, but can be generated under adapted conditions

If candidates have not yet generated enough evidence to satisfy the unit requirements, you should consider whether the normal conditions of assessment can be adapted.

This may mean providing candidates with additional and alternative opportunities to demonstrate their competence, knowledge and understanding through a range of reasonable and practicable alternative activities, for example:

- ◆ **Remote testing** (this could be paper based, app based, online, audio, video): This should contain content to assess skills, knowledge and understanding and should include sufficient challenge and application to demonstrate the appropriate level of attainment. This may include open book essay or report writing in lieu of closed book
- ◆ **Professional discussion:** using and recording professional discussion between a candidate and an assessor focusing on, and enhancing, evidence already provided or demonstrated by the learner — including real work activities, practical tasks, a case study, project, portfolio or some other form of assessment. Further guidance on the use of professional discussion is given in appendix 2.
- ◆ **Practical assessment:** In some circumstances, evidence may be assessed using remote assessment (video, photographic, portfolio, witness testimony), alongside work already demonstrated and assessed.

SQA will provide subject specific guidance where it is not possible to change conditions of assessment.

Circumstance 4: Evidence is incomplete but the conditions of assessment cannot be adapted

If it is not possible for candidates to generate evidence under normal conditions and it is not possible to adapt the conditions of assessment, you must postpone the assessment.

1.2 Authentication strategies

is important to ensure that work submitted by a candidate is their own. The risk of malpractice is greater when you do not have the opportunity to observe candidates carrying out assessment activities. The growth of web companies selling essays and research reports is a particular problem. There are various web-based services that can detect plagiarism, but the following strategies can also be effective in authenticating candidates' work:

- ◆ questioning
- ◆ write-ups under timed conditions
- ◆ use of personal logs
- ◆ personal statements produced by your candidates

Where flexibility around conditions of assessment allows open book activities to replace established closed book practice, you can convert your centre-devised closed-book assessments into open book assessments. Please note that once you have converted a closed book assessment into an open book assessment, you can never use it again as a closed book assessment.

1.3 Approach for Graded Units

The examples above for individual units relate equally to Graded Units.

1.4 Retention of candidate evidence

As of Monday 23 March 2020, we require that all centres must keep candidate evidence for six months after the resulting date of each qualification. You can find detailed information on our requirements for evidence retention on our [website](#).

2 Quality assurance

2.1 Internal quality assurance

We require our approved centres to apply robust internal quality assurance strategies to assessment decisions made during the COVID-19 emergency. This will involve your centre applying your internal verification procedures to support, advise, verify and confirm the work of individual assessors and internal verifiers.

This requirement is necessary to support any changes to normal conditions of assessment.

2.2 External quality assurance

External verification activities will continue for centres who are still assessing and resulting qualifications. This will be undertaken remotely, and we will be in touch to make the necessary arrangements with each centre.

We retain the right to undertake a risk-based approach to sampling retrospectively (for example, if pass rates seem to have changed significantly).

3 Resulting and certification

Once unit assessment decisions have been finalised, please submit candidate results for the planned units within the group award to SQA through normal channels, where possible. We aim to undertake certification in line with normal arrangements, but we will let you know of any change to this.

Assessment appeals

We acknowledge that your centre is experienced, trusted and trustworthy and is able to utilise and apply professional judgement to deliver fair and reasonable outcomes for your candidates. Robust internal verification procedures will ensure that all available candidate evidence is reviewed by professional and experienced staff before results are submitted to SQA. Keeping robust records of the evidence gathered and the decisions made in your centre will allow you to respond confidently to any academic appeals. But, given the unusual circumstances and revised arrangements, an increase in appeals may be expected, and your centre must have robust plans in place to deal with appeals promptly and efficiently.

Your centre's established assessment appeals process should be followed for any candidate who feels that the assessment outcome reached does not accurately reflect their achievement.

Appendix 2: Professional discussion guideline

When you have not been able to see your candidates perform activities at first hand, it will be useful to ask them questions about what they did and why they did it. This will help you to be more confident that the work they have presented to you is their own.

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

You start by asking the candidate questions about the evidence, and a discussion ensues. You must record the discussion — this should be done using Professional Discussion Form to physically record the discussion or to reference audio or video recorded discussion.

You are responsible for ensuring that the candidate brings the points that need to be covered into the discussion. The candidate needs to be able to show you how what they say in the discussion is backed up in other ways — for example by referring to product evidence, witness testimonies or other material either developed through work or in other assessments.

Your role is to manage the process to allow your candidate to prove their knowledge and understanding in a supported environment — without constantly directing and leading conversation. During the discussion, you can use a number of techniques to ensure the discussion remains focused and effective. For example, you can periodically summarise points covered; and you can ask questions to probe for more information or to clarify certain points of the discussion.

At the beginning of the discussion, you are likely to be doing most of the talking — reiterating the reason for the discussion and agreeing how the main points of the discussion will be assessed, recorded etc. As the discussion progresses, there should be a gradual ‘handing over’ to allow the candidate to enter a full discussion where they have the opportunity to do most of the talking.

Use of professional discussion

- ◆ Allows a candidate to demonstrate the authenticity of their evidence, and for the assessor to confirm its reliability and validity.
- ◆ Provides evidence when gaps have been identified in a candidate’s evidence.
- ◆ Suitable for assessing higher-order analytical and decision-making skills.
- ◆ The assessor can 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 across a range of units.
- ◆ The approach helps to make use of naturally occurring evidence in the assessment of some higher order vocational learning.

Significant construction features

- ◆ Professional discussion is a method of assessment and, as such, should not be confused with having an unfocused social chat.
- ◆ The purpose of this assessment and its focus need to be clearly defined and agreed between assessor and candidate.
- ◆ The assessor must make a plan for the assessment and give this to the candidate.
- ◆ The *Professional Discussion Form* must be used. It should define 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 purposes of the discussion are met. The assessor should not regard this as simply consist of a set of boxes to tick but must use the space to reference evidence against the outcome and/or standard.