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Scottish Vocational Qualifications

Qualification Verification Summary Report 2018
Workplace Core Skills: Communication

Introduction

This report covers the external qualification verification of Workplace Core Skills: Communication units during session 2017–2018. External verifiers visited various centres, including private training providers, local councils, and colleges, who were offering training to workplace-based candidates across Scotland.

The units selected for verification were:

F425 04 Workplace Core Skills: Communication (SCQF level 3)
F426 04 Workplace Core Skills: Communication (SCQF level 4)
F427 04 Workplace Core Skills: Communication (SCQF level 5)
F428 04 Workplace Core Skills: Communication (SCQF level 6)

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.

Almost all assessors and verifiers were fully qualified and occupationally experienced to assess the Core Skills: Communication SVQ award. More than a few were working towards assessor or verifier awards, or upgrading existing qualifications at the time of the visit.

Visiting verifiers saw evidence of continuous professional development (CPD) in paper-based records or within e-portfolios, which usually included copies of training certificates and staff CPD logs. A few centres used reflective logs, which allowed staff to reflect on how their CPD was influencing their ongoing practice. Most showed evidence of recent CPD activity, including attendance at meaningful events, such as the Scottish Learning Festival and Disability Awareness training, although there was limited evidence of subject-specific CPD relating to Core Skills: Communication. A few centres had addressed this by holding a meeting to review the annual qualification verification summary report.

A few of the newer centres had hosted an SQA development visit for Workplace Core Skills to help develop staff competence for the assessment of the awards.

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

Minutes of staff meetings or standardisation meetings provided information on reviews of assessment environments, equipment, and reference, learning and assessment materials in more than a few centres. In a few centres, these review meetings were quite informal — procedures for review were less prescriptive, and the frequency of the reviews was not formally recorded. Whilst it was clear there was ongoing professional scrutiny of assessment environments, verifiers concluded that discussions could be more formalised; for example, they could be a standing agenda item in regular standardisation meetings.

Pre-assessment checklists, site selection checklists, or health and safety reviews were used in many cases to carry out initial detailed checks of candidates' workplaces.

Category 3: Candidate support

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

In all centres, candidates' development needs and prior achievements were checked at the entry or induction stage, and additional support was arranged as required. Almost all centres checked through SQA systems or used Core Skills profiles to ascertain their candidates' current achievements as they enrolled. If they had already attained units whilst at school, almost all centres accredited their prior learning. A small number of centres preferred candidates to refresh their skills using workplace-based assessment, even if they had attained the same level at school in a classroom context.

A few centres used diagnostic tools to gather information about candidates' strengths and weaknesses to inform formative work and subsequent guidance. A few assessors had specialist skills in identifying learning needs and were able to offer customised support to candidates.

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

In all centres contact between assessors and candidates was regularly scheduled through a range of communication methods. All workplace-based candidates had face-to-face meetings with their assessors in the workplace every two to six weeks to progress their assessments and update learning plans. Candidates also made use of e-mail, telephone and e-portfolio platforms to contact their assessors when they required additional support.

A few centres used information packs designed for workplace staff to advise employers/mentors how they could support candidates to link learning with day-to-day workplace activity.

Category 4: Internal assessment and verification

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

In most centres, staff prepared well for external verification with well-structured and easy-to-navigate paper-based folders, electronic master files and e-portfolios.

Almost all centres had effective verification systems in place, and had clearly defined the roles and responsibilities of assessors and verifiers. Internal verification sampling was usually based on risk, although a few centres had 100% sampling as standard. In most centres, internal verification documentation was clear and provided detailed feedback to assessors. For a small number of centres, verifiers recommended that practices be more formally recorded in the minutes of standardisation meetings.

Standardisation meetings were held at varying intervals, eg four times per year, every six months or on demand. Many centres followed a set agenda, and some minutes showed wide-ranging discussions across all aspects of Modern Apprenticeship delivery. However, there were very few mentions of standardisation relating specifically to Core Skills: Communication units.

In a few instances, internal verification was carried out after the candidate portfolios had been completed, leaving little opportunity for corrective action.

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

Verifiers noted various methods of assessment in use across centres, such as product evidence, reflective accounts, questioning, witness testimony and observation. Most centres used well-structured assessment tasks related to the workplace (or other units in the Modern Apprentice qualification), which were relevant and meaningful. There were a few creative uses of naturally occurring evidence that allow candidates to integrate communication tasks.

In some cases, centres devised assessment instruments based on the SQA assessment support packs (ASPs). However, several centres relied entirely on the ASPs for assessment material without seeking more relevant, naturally occurring opportunities. In a few centres, there was a lack of internal verification involvement in agreeing suitable assessment tasks. Some centres used the ASP assessment checklists to record candidates' achievements, but the assessment records within candidates' portfolios were rather vague.

In a few instances, insufficient attention had been paid to word counts and time limits during assessment. The length and level of complexity of the Reading and Understanding text must be taken into account, to ensure candidates are assessed appropriately.

In several centres, assessors used mobile phone video or audio recording of their candidates' performance to aid standardisation.

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

In most centres, candidates were required to sign disclaimer forms during induction to confirm they would be submitting their own work. Candidates using e-portfolios were asked to tick a disclaimer box when logging in. Authenticity was also assured by assessors working closely with candidates, observing assessment activity or conducting assessment under supervision. Although malpractice and plagiarism policies were evident in most centres, a few relied more informally on assessors being able to notice plagiarism issues.

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

All assessors sampled were making consistent judgments in line with the levels of the awards. Most provided supportive and detailed feedback to the candidates.

However, external verifiers noted there is room for improvement in many centres. The evaluation responses within Task 1 Reading and Understanding assessments were borderline in several centres, and assessors should do more to ensure this evidence requirement is properly addressed. Candidates could be given a little more time to answer when oral questioning is used, and questions could be more tightly structured as evaluation of a text's effectiveness is of equal importance to identifying and summarising the key points. The use of assessment checklists from the assessment support packs helped to ensure accurate recording and assisted standardisation.

In some centres, Writing assessments only just met the standards required for levels 5 and 6,. particularly when assessment checklists were not being used to record achievement. In some centres, there was scope for more detailed feedback on the assessment checklists, particularly when assessing Speaking and Listening.

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

In all centres visited, candidate evidence was retained for various periods, ranging from three weeks to five years after certification. In all cases, SQA requirements were met or exceeded. A few centres struggled to find where this was written within their centre policy.

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

Practices varied in the achievement of this criterion. In some cases, a clear evidence trail existed from the SQA co-ordinators receiving qualification verification reports through to holding meetings and signing off recommendations and actions. In a few centres, this was explained anecdotally. In a small number of centres, reports were emailed to relevant staff or uploaded to a shared drive with a notification.

A few centres completed detailed analysis of qualification verifiers' feedback after each visit, noting the findings and follow-up actions, making it clear how reports will influence future activity.

Areas of good practice report by qualification verifiers

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

♦ Reflective CPD logs, where staff reflect on how their CPD will influence ongoing practice.

♦ An information pack for workplace staff that advises employers/mentors how to support candidates.

♦ Documentation for review during qualification verification events that is clearly referenced to the SQA qualification verification criteria.

♦ Creative assessment approaches that draw on naturally occurring evidence.

♦ Use of mobile phones to capture video/audio evidence of candidates being assessed for Speaking and Listening in the workplace.

Specific areas for development

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

♦ All centres should ensure some subject-specific CPD relating to Core Skills: Communication each year. This could include holding meetings to review the annual Qualification Verification Summary Report and creating individual CPD development points.

♦ Discussions about scrutiny of assessment environments etc (Criterion 2.4) could be more formalised; for example, as a standing agenda item in regular standardisation meetings.

♦ Inclusion of Core Skills: Communication (and other Core Skills) as a standing item at standardisation meetings to draw attention to specific issues.

♦ More systematic involvement of internal verifiers to agree on suitable assessment tasks.

♦ Internal verification practices to be recorded more formally in the minutes of standardisation meetings.

♦ Internal verification to be carried out prior to candidate portfolios being completed, to allow opportunity for corrective action if required.

♦ Assessors and internal verifiers should meet to build confidence in identifying naturally occurring opportunities for gathering assessment evidence.

♦ A more structured approach could be adopted to disseminate qualification verification information, particularly how reports inform future assessment practice.