



Systems Verification Criteria: guidance for centres

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Change log: Version 3.0 March 2025

This version replaces the previous publication Systems Verification Criteria: Guidance for Centres v2.0, published in March 2021.

Location of change: How to use the systems verification guide, and under all criteria

More information has been added about all qualification types, regulated qualifications, and National Courses with external assessment.

The subheadings for each criterion have been updated to better explain what must be documented by centres and how the criterion should be applied in practice.

The former subheading **SQA requirements** has been changed to **SQA's essential requirements for all qualification types**.

In addition to the subheading **Additional requirements for regulated qualifications**, a subheading for Ofqual-regulated qualifications only, and a subheading **Additional requirements for National Courses with external assessment** have been added where applicable.

Location of change: Criterion 1.1

How do I apply this criterion: An additional paragraph has been added on generic policies and procedures for SQA and other awarding bodies, and stating specific SQA requirements where appropriate.

Location of change: Criterion 1.3

SQA's requirements for all qualification types: Sentence added about specifying responsibility for reporting breaches of security of assessments published by SQA.

Sentence added on responsibility for reporting any suspected centre malpractice, and any findings of centre malpractice or maladministration communicated to them by another awarding or industry body.

Additional requirements for National Courses with external assessment: Sentence added on notifying SQA of changes to arrangements for secure storage of examination question papers and materials.

Location of change: Criterion 1.3 and Criterion 2.1

Additional requirements for qualifications regulated by Ofqual section added. Sentence added on responsibility for informing SQA of any changes to assessors and

internal verifiers involved in the delivery of internally-assessed qualifications regulated by Ofqual (on SQA Connect).

Location of change: Criterion 1.4

Additional requirements for National Courses with external assessment: Section added to cover responsibilities of staff for managing external assessment.

Location of change: Criterion 1.5

SQA's essential requirements for all qualifications: Sentence added about cooperating with any SQA investigation and implementing actions as determined by SQA, subject to successful appeal.

How do I apply this criterion: Section added on artificial intelligence.

Additional support: link to Ofqual and Qualifications policy and procedures for malpractice (2023) added.

Location of change: Criterion 1.6

How do I apply this criterion: Sentence added on close professional relationship including line management of or by a candidate.

Sentence added on the requirement to address any conflict of interest of language of assessment translators, for specific customised qualifications only.

Location of change: Criterion 1.9

SQA's essential requirements for all qualifications: Sentence added about documenting, in roles and responsibilities and quality assurance procedures, the need to comply with requests from SQA to carry out quality assurance, within the required timescales. Sentence also added about the outcome for this criterion being set to Red if a centre does not comply with a request to carry out systems verification within the required timescale.

How do I apply this criterion: Sentence added about adding this requirement to the roles and responsibilities of the SQA co-ordinator and assessment and internal verification procedures.

Location of change: Criterion 2.1

How do I apply this criterion: Wording updated to include that the centre must recruit, train and deploy sufficient numbers of assessors and internal verifiers.

Location of change: Criterion 2.5

How do I apply this criterion: Sentence added on assessment sites which the centre cannot provide physical access to for SQA staff.

Location of change: Criterion 3.5

SQA's essential requirements for all qualification types and Examples of evidence: Updated to align with Quality Assurance for Assessment Arrangements documents (for National Courses), including amended requirements for internal verification of assessment arrangements and evidence, and sharing information about assessment arrangements with delivery partners.

Requirement to obtain consent from the candidate to share their personal information with SQA removed.

Additional requirements for National Courses with external assessment: Section added to cover processes for notifying SQA of assessment arrangements requests for external assessments.

Additional requirements for regulated qualifications: Section added to cover reasonable adjustments to assessment approaches in regulated qualifications, including the need to contact SQA if a proposed adjustment would alter the proposed assessment strategy significantly.

How do I apply the criterion: Wording amended to explain reasonable adjustments to assessment approaches.

Examples of evidence: Records of internal verification process for assessment arrangements added, including sampling strategy.

Additional support: Links to updated guidance on reasonable adjustments for SVQs and other regulated qualifications added.

Location of change: Criterion 4.5

How do I apply this criterion: Additional sentence added on documenting roles and responsibilities and process for reporting breaches of security of SQA assessments immediately to SQA.

Additional paragraphs added on security of assessment when using technology to assess remotely.

Additional support: Link added to SQA guidance on using technology to support assessment remotely.

Location of change: Category 5

New introductory statement about this category now being used in systems verification of centres delivering National Courses with external assessment.

Location of change: Criterion 5.1

How do I apply this criterion: Reference added to Visiting Assessment and submitting coursework for external marking.

Additional support: Links added to Guidance on Conditions of Assessment for Coursework and qualifications pages on the website with course specifications detailing required conditions of assessment.

Location of change: Criterion 5.2

Additional requirements for centres delivering National Courses with external assessment: Sentence added on the requirement to submit a self-assessment annually to SQA on secure storage facilities and arrangements for NQ examination question papers and materials.

Examples of evidence: Completed self-assessments added.

Additional support: self-assessment pro forma added.

Location of change: Criterion 5.3

Throughout: Updated information added about the Examination Exceptional Circumstances and Appeals processes.

Location of change: Criterion 6.1

Why is this important and SQA's essential requirements for all qualification

types: Candidate contact details (telephone number, email address) added as additional to, or instead of, candidate home addresses.

SQA's essential requirements for all qualification types: Candidate induction checklist as evidence of candidate having been informed that their personal information will be shared with SQA.

Location of change: Criteria 6.2 and 6.3

Additional requirements for regulated qualifications:

References to individual SVQ units removed in relation to the 10-week rule.

Wording amended to clarify that centres cannot *claim* certification within 10 weeks of entry for applicable qualifications.

Location of change: Criterion 6.3

Additional requirements for centres delivering National Courses with external assessment: Section added, including reference to NQ Key Dates document.

How do I apply the criterion: Paragraph added on the requirement for centres to inform Centre Support at SQA immediately if they have submitted any incorrect results.

How to use the Systems Verification Criteria Guide

You should also read the Systems Verification Process Guide for Centres, which will explain the planning, conduct and reporting on the outcomes of systems verification.

The following headings are used under every criterion:

Impact rating: high / medium / low

This rating indicates the level of risk to SQA, and your centre and candidates, if you do not fully comply with or implement the criterion.

An Amber rating in a criterion with a high impact rating, will automatically pull the overall outcome down to Reasonable Confidence, rather than Broad Confidence

Why is this important?

This explains how the criterion ensures high standards in SQA-approved centres and maintains the integrity of SQA qualifications.

SQA's essential requirements for all qualification types

This section gives details of the specific requirements that SQA, as the awarding body, sets out for this criterion. It will not be included if all the relevant information is included in the wording of the criterion itself.

Information in this section **must** be written into your policy or procedure.

These requirements apply to **all** qualification types:

- National Units
- National Courses
- Awards
- National Progression Awards (NPAs) and National Certificates (NCs)
- Higher National Certificates (HNCs) and Diplomas (HNDs)
- Professional Development Awards (PDAs)
- Advanced Certificates and Diplomas
- Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQs)
- National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs)
- Customised Awards

Additional requirements for regulated qualifications (where applicable)

This section gives details of any specific additional requirements for qualifications which are externally regulated by SQA Accreditation, under the SQA Accreditation Principles, or by Ofqual or Qualification Wales under their General Conditions of Regulation.

This includes:

SQA Accreditation:

- Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQs)
- Regulatory and Licensing qualifications which are required for some regulated job roles (eg First Aid at Work, security industry qualifications, licensed trade qualifications)
- Other qualifications which are in the mandatory section of a Scottish Apprenticeship framework (eg competence qualifications, knowledge qualifications, Workplace Core Skills)

Ofqual and Qualifications Wales:

- NVQs, Awards, Certificates and Diplomas for specific occupational sectors
- Assessor and verifier qualifications

You can check if the qualifications you offer are subject to regulation by visiting the relevant website: [SQA Accreditation](#), [Ofqual](#), or [Qualifications Wales](#).

If you offer a regulated qualification, the information in this section **must** be written into your policy or procedure.

If you do not offer regulated qualifications, you must not include these requirements in your policy or procedure.

Additional requirements for National Courses with external assessment (where applicable)

This section gives details of any specific additional requirements for National Courses which have external assessment in the form of SQA examinations and externally-assessed coursework in some cases. These are:

- National 5 courses
- Highers
- Advanced Highers

If you offer National Courses, the information in this section **must** be written into your policy or procedure.

If you do not offer National Courses, you must not include these requirements in your policy or procedure.

How do I apply this criterion?

This section gives further details on what information you must document and how you can manage and record information relating to the criterion.

Examples of evidence

This describes the type of evidence you should present to the verifier.

The examples are those we commonly see during verification, but your centre may document or record information in a different way.

You may provide different evidence reflecting the actual practice in your centre, providing it clearly meets the quality criterion. You may use different terminology to the terms used in our guidance.

Additional support

Links to other SQA guidance and external sources of support will be listed here.

Systems verification criteria

Category 1: Management of a centre

Quality assurance is managed effectively and documented processes that support all SQA qualifications are implemented, reviewed and continuously improved.

Criterion 1.1: Policies and procedures must be documented and reviewed to ensure full compliance with SQA quality criteria.

Impact rating

High

Why is this important?

This ensures that there is a system for the management of quality systems in the centre. You must document your system so it can be audited and evaluated against SQA requirements, both by the centre and by SQA's systems verifiers.

You should review your quality documentation (eg policies, procedures, recording documentation) regularly to ensure that it reflects current practice, is up to date, and is fit for purpose.

SQA's essential requirements for all qualification types

- You must document your quality system.
- You must record and action the outcomes of reviews of your documented processes.
- You must have a system of version control for documentation.

How do I apply the criterion?

You may hold your documents electronically or in hard copy, but they should include policies, procedures and supporting documentation for the assessment of SQA qualifications. Your documentation should be made available to all staff and candidates involved in the SQA programmes. All staff should be fully aware of the policies and procedures operating within the centre.

If you are also working with other awarding bodies, there will be some policies and procedures which are common. In these cases, you may refer to 'awarding bodies', rather than 'SQA' where the requirements are the same. If there are specific SQA requirements relating to a policy or procedure which are different from other awarding bodies, you must state this, for example in an appendix to the main document, and in induction materials for staff and candidates delivering or undertaking SQA qualifications.

You must have a documented schedule for reviewing your quality management system on an ongoing basis and demonstrate how you will record and action reviews and ensure that all staff are made aware of any changes that are made.

Version control could be evidenced by version numbers and dates of the last review recorded on documentation (for example as a footer on every page).

For some key policy documents, it may also be appropriate to use a version control table to keep track of what changes were made, when and by whom.

You must also make clear in your documented roles and responsibilities who is responsible for reviewing, updating, controlling and disseminating documents relating to quality assurance of SQA qualifications.

Examples of evidence

Documents:

- Quality manual containing all SQA-related policies, procedures and recording documents
- Staff and / or candidate handbook containing SQA-related policies, procedures and recording documents
- Policies, procedures and recording documents stored on an electronic document management system

Reviews:

- A schedule for the review of policies and procedures
- Internal audits of SQA-related policies and procedures
- Records of changes made as a result of review of policies and procedures

Version control:

- Version control information noted on each document
- A version control table within your quality manual

Criterion 1.2: Policies and procedures must be endorsed by senior management and disseminated to all relevant staff.

Impact rating

Low

Why is this important?

Senior management endorsement of policies and procedures gives a clear message to all staff and candidates that your centre is committed to quality assurance.

Staff must be made aware of the policies and procedures operating in your centre, and of their responsibility to act in accordance with them.

SQA's essential requirements for all qualification types

All requirements are included within the wording of this criterion.

How do I apply the criterion?

The evidence for this criterion will largely arise from policy control information in the various policy documents, or separate statements which confirm senior management support.

You must also have evidence of dissemination to staff.

Examples of evidence

Endorsement:

- Statement from your chief executive
- Foreword from senior management in a quality manual
- Manager or committee responsibility for development and review of policies is stated on documents
- Signature of a senior manager included on master documents

Dissemination:

- A statement or procedure on how documents are disseminated to staff
- A distribution list
- Evidence of digital dissemination eg SharePoint, Google drive, Dropbox
- Minutes of meetings which include discussion of relevant policy and procedures
- Staff induction materials

Criterion 1.3: SQA must be notified of any changes that may affect the centre's ability to meet the quality assurance criteria.

Impact rating

High

Why is this important?

This information must be documented in full so that staff are aware of this requirement, particularly if they are new to a role.

SQA must hold accurate and current information on approved centres. Most communications from SQA will be sent to the SQA co-ordinator, so it is essential that their name and contact details are current.

Providing this information allows SQA to minimise possible risks and to provide centres with additional support if required.

SQA's essential requirements for all qualification types

You must document, in a procedure or in the roles and responsibilities of staff, who will notify SQA of any changes.

You must show clearly that any of the following specific changes will be reported to SQA:

- change of premises
- change of head of centre, owner or SQA co-ordinator
- change of name of centre or business
- change of contact details
- outcome of internal and / or external investigations
- removal of centre and / or qualification approval by another awarding body

You must notify SQA immediately if you do not have enough appropriate assessors or internal verifiers (IVs) to deliver the qualifications you have candidates entered for.

SQA requires centres to bring any concerns of centre malpractice to our attention as soon as the centre has carried out an initial screening exercise to establish the nature of the concern. This includes any concerns where the centre has judged that no further action is necessary (see also criterion 1.5).

In addition, SQA requires centres to promptly bring to our attention any findings of centre malpractice or maladministration communicated to them by another awarding or industry body.

You must also include who will report any breach of security of assessments published by SQA on its secure site (see criterion 4.5).

Additional requirements for qualifications regulated by Ofqual

You must document how you will inform SQA of any changes to individual assessors and IVs involved in the delivery of internally-assessed qualifications regulated by Ofqual (on SQA Connect).

Additional requirements for National Courses with external assessment:

You must document how you will inform SQA of any changes to your centre's arrangements for secure storage of SQA examination papers and candidate evidence.

How do I apply the criterion?

You must inform SQA by writing to your Business Development and Customer Support contact about:

- change of premises
- change of head of centre, owner or SQA co-ordinator
- change of name of centre or business
- change of contact details
- the outcome of any relevant internal or external investigations, including malpractice (see criterion 1.5)
- removal of centre and / or qualification approval by another awarding body

Examples of evidence

- Roles and responsibilities of SQA co-ordinator or head of centre which lists changes to be reported in full
- Evidence you have notified SQA of changes (copies of correspondence, updates to SQA Connect etc)

Additional support

Information on how to contact SQA can be found in the [Frequently Asked Questions](#) on our website.

Criterion 1.4: The roles and responsibilities of those involved in the administration, management, assessment and quality assurance of SQA qualifications across all sites must be clearly documented and disseminated.

Impact rating

Medium

Why is this important?

This is to ensure that all staff in your centre are fully aware of their own role and responsibilities, as well as those of others involved in providing SQA qualifications. This includes anyone subcontracted or working in partnership with your centre.

SQA's essential requirements for all qualification types

You must document, and disseminate to relevant staff, the roles and responsibilities of those involved in:

- the management of SQA qualifications
- the administration of SQA qualifications
- the assessment and quality assurance of SQA qualifications
- subcontracted services or partnership arrangements

Additional requirements for centres delivering National Courses with external assessment

You must document the roles and responsibilities of staff responsible for managing external assessment — SQA examinations and externally-assessed coursework (where applicable). This may include visiting assessment by SQA for performance assessments.

All information on managing external assessment is in the document *Delivering National Qualifications: Guide for SQA Co-ordinators* on SQA Connect www.sqa.org.uk/sqaconnect.

How do I apply the criterion?

The roles and responsibilities may be shown in job descriptions, specific role descriptions or in procedural documents, but must be sufficiently detailed.

The management of SQA qualifications:

In *Systems Approval and Verification: Support Materials* we provide exemplar roles. We have grouped all responsibilities for managing SQA qualifications under the role of SQA co-ordinator, but this may not suit your centre. These responsibilities may be split

between different members of staff, but you must show clearly how all the responsibilities are covered.

The administration of SQA qualifications:

If your centre has dedicated administration staff, for example for candidate enrolment or data management, you must also document their roles and responsibilities. If administration is undertaken by the SQA co-ordinator or another member of staff, these responsibilities can be recorded in their role.

The assessment and quality assurance of SQA qualifications:

You must have documented roles and responsibilities for assessors and internal verifiers.

Subcontracted services or partnership arrangements:

If you subcontract services, or work in partnership with another organisation to assess or quality assure SQA qualifications, you must provide evidence of a signed contract, partnership agreement or memorandum of understanding that clearly identifies the responsibilities of all parties.

You may also wish to document the responsibilities of candidates.

Examples of evidence

- Organisational chart showing the relevant people involved in the SQA programme
- Person specification or job role (if SQA responsibilities are included)
- Information on method of dissemination of this information
- Documented system or procedure for managing partnerships and subcontracts
- Signed contract, partnership agreements or memoranda of understanding for subcontracts or partnerships

Additional support

Example roles and responsibilities can be found in [Systems Approval and Verification: Support Materials](#).

[Guidance on the use of alternative assessment sites and partnerships](#) can be found on our website.

Criterion 1.5: Suspected candidate or staff malpractice must be investigated and acted upon, in line with SQA requirements.

Impact rating

High

Why is this important?

SQA is committed to safeguarding its reputation for the quality and credibility of its qualifications. All allegations of malpractice must be investigated consistently, fairly and impartially.

SQA's essential requirements for all qualification types

Your policies and procedures for malpractice must cover both malpractice by candidates and malpractice by centre staff.

SQA's expectations are described in *Malpractice: Information for Centres*.

You must use the following definition:

'Malpractice means any act, default or practice (whether deliberate or resulting from neglect or default) which is a breach of SQA requirements, including any act, default or practice which:

- compromises, attempts to compromise, or may compromise the process of assessment, the integrity of any SQA qualification, or the validity of a result or certificate; and/or
- damages the authority, reputation or credibility of SQA or any officer, employee or agent of SQA

Malpractice can arise for a variety of reasons:

- Some incidents are intentional and aim to give an unfair advantage or disadvantage in an examination or assessment (deliberate non-compliance).
- Some incidents arise due to ignorance of SQA requirements, or carelessness or neglect in applying the requirements (maladministration).'

It is necessary to investigate any suspected instances of malpractice, whether they are intentional or not, to protect the integrity of the qualification and to identify any wider lessons to be learned.

You must describe:

- how suspected malpractice can be reported
- who will undertake investigations and how these may be managed
- how the outcome of an investigation will be communicated
- the types of measures which may be applied to candidates or staff if malpractice is proven
- what actions you may take to prevent further occurrences
- how candidates or staff can appeal a malpractice decision (internally and to SQA)
- what records will be kept and for how long

Any suspected cases of centre malpractice must be reported to SQA as soon as you have carried out an initial screening exercise to establish the nature of the concern. This includes any concerns where you take the view that no further action is necessary.

You must co-operate with any SQA investigation and implement actions as determined by SQA, subject to successful appeal.

You must inform us of any investigation carried out by an awarding body, industry body, funding agency or regulator which may or may not affect the delivery of SQA qualifications. You must also promptly bring to our attention any findings of centre malpractice or maladministration communicated to you by another awarding or industry body. You must notify us promptly if another awarding body removes approval from your centre, regardless of the reason given for this withdrawal. This will allow us to assess any risk to SQA qualifications you offer.

Additional requirements for regulated qualifications

For qualifications subject to statutory regulation by SQA Accreditation, Ofqual or Qualifications Wales, you are required to report any suspected cases of candidate malpractice to SQA. This requirement must be written into your procedures.

SQA will need to share information with the relevant regulator, and if the regulator decides to get involved directly, you and SQA will need to co-operate.

There are additional rights of appeal for candidates for regulated qualifications and you must let candidates know about them.

How do I apply the criterion?

All staff and candidates must understand your procedures relating to malpractice.

Your documented procedure must be made available to all staff involved in the delivery and assessment of SQA qualifications as part of the centre staff induction process. This should also be discussed during staff development activities, including standardisation meetings.

As part of candidate induction you must outline possible malpractice, such as plagiarism, collusion, copying, or disruptive behaviour during an assessment.

Any concerns of possible staff or candidate malpractice must be investigated as described in SQA's *Malpractice: Standards for Devolved Investigations*, and records must be maintained and made available to SQA on request.

Artificial intelligence

SQA's current position is that learners cannot submit AI outputs as their own work. This constitutes plagiarism, one of the forms of candidate malpractice. You can find the most up-to-date advice from SQA here: [Generative artificial intelligence \(AI\) in assessments](#).

Examples of evidence

- Documented malpractice policy and procedure
- Log of instances of malpractice or suspected malpractice — or a template for this
- Policy contained within candidate induction materials
- Guidance for candidates on avoiding plagiarism
- Signed declarations of authenticity from candidates
- Policy contained in induction materials for assessors and IVs

Additional support

Guidance on writing malpractice procedures can be found in:

[Systems Approval and Verification: Support Materials](#)

[Candidate disclaimer for SVQ Portfolio](#)

[Reporting malpractice concerns](#)

[Malpractice: Information for centres](#)

[Malpractice policy and procedures for SQA Qualifications regulated by Ofqual and / or Qualification Wales](#)

[The Appeal Process: Information for Centres](#)

[Generative artificial intelligence \(AI\) in assessments](#)

Criterion 1.6: No-one with a personal interest in the outcome of an assessment is to be involved in the assessment process. This includes assessors, internal verifiers (IVs) and invigilators.

Impact rating

Low

Why is this important?

Having a personal interest in the outcome of an assessment amounts to a conflict of interest, which poses a risk to the integrity of assessment. You must take steps to mitigate against this risk.

How do I apply the criterion?

Assessors, IVs and invigilators must be informed at induction of the requirement on them to declare any personal interest, and what the mechanism is for making such a declaration (eg informing their line manager in writing or completing a form and submitting it to the SQA co-ordinator).

Staff are required to make a declaration if they are related to a candidate, or have a private relationship or a close professional or business relationship with them, and are currently deployed to:

- set assessments which this candidate will undertake
- make assessment judgements on this candidate's evidence
- internally verify assessment decisions on this candidate's work
- invigilate an assessment which this candidate is sitting

A close professional or business relationship could include being the line manager of a candidate or being line-managed by the candidate.

Staff are also required to make a declaration if they are related to or have a private relationship with another member of centre staff involved in the internal verification of assessments. For example, where the assessment decisions of an assessor are to be internally verified by a relative.

Conflict of interest also applies where an individual stands to make a personal financial gain from the outcome of the assessment, as opposed to payment to the centre through normal business practices.

Copies of documentation, including details of the action taken to mitigate against the conflict of interest must be retained for a year after completion of the qualification by the candidate in question.

Additional requirement for Customised Awards where candidates undertake their assessment in languages other than English

Where a Customised unit or qualification has been assessed in a language other than English, the centre is responsible for ensuring that materials submitted to SQA for remote verification activities are translated into English. The centre is responsible for identifying an appropriate independent, third-party translator to translate into the required language. Any potential conflicts of interest must be identified and addressed as described above.

Examples of evidence

- Procedure for managing conflict of interest for assessors, IVs and invigilators
- Signed staff declarations
- Signatures of assessors and IVs to confirm no personal interest in the outcome of assessment on candidate portfolios
- Information (in staff handbook, or induction checklist, for example) that any interest must be declared, and to whom
- Records of notification of conflicts of interest and actions taken to address these

Additional support

Guidance on writing procedures for dealing with conflicts of interest in assessment can be found in [Systems Approval and Verification: Support Materials](#).

Criterion 1.7: There must be an effective process for communicating with staff, candidates and SQA.

Impact rating

Medium

Why is this important?

This is to ensure that all staff are fully aware of SQA's current requirements. This could be information on specific qualifications, or about administrative procedures, or wider policy or qualification development issues. SQA will only send this information directly to the SQA co-ordinator, so you must have an effective internal process for communicating information to relevant staff. It is important that you can demonstrate that you have established systems for communicating with SQA and candidates in order to keep everyone fully informed.

How do I apply the criterion?

You must state, in your roles and responsibilities, who has responsibility for communicating with SQA and for distribution of information from SQA to staff and candidates.

Managers may have responsibility for disseminating information to their staff.

Individual members of staff can also keep themselves up to date using the SQA website and the MyAlerts service.

You may keep decision logs or minutes of staff meetings. Other staff, such as assessors or tutors, may have specific responsibility for passing on information to candidates, and receiving information from them.

You may be asked to, or wish to, provide feedback on certain issues to SQA (eg comments on qualifications, feedback on examination papers) and your roles and responsibilities can also cover this.

Examples of evidence

- Documented roles and responsibilities (eg SQA co-ordinator, IVs, line managers)
- Evidence of digital communication, such as emails, texts, group chat, discussion threads, e-portfolios
- Distribution lists
- Minutes of meetings

Additional support

You can sign up for [MyAlerts](#) on our website.

Criterion 1.8: Feedback from candidates and staff must be sought and used to inform centre improvement plans.

Impact rating

Low

Why is this important?

You must ensure that staff and candidates are given the opportunity to provide feedback on your systems and the SQA qualifications that candidates undertake. This feedback should be reviewed so that your systems and programmes are improved for future participants.

Feedback must be used to:

- assist with monitoring the operation of your systems
- ensure that you continue to comply with SQA criteria
- inform continuous improvement

How do I apply the criterion?

You must develop procedures and mechanisms to encourage, capture and review feedback from your candidates, and from your assessment team.

Feedback must be reviewed and acted upon. You must keep evidence of action being taken as a result of feedback (where appropriate).

Examples of evidence

- Feedback procedure
- Feedback forms
- Analysis of feedback
- Records of actions in response to feedback
- Minutes of meetings

Criterion 1.9: The centre must comply with requests for access to records, information, candidates, staff and premises for the purpose of external quality assurance activities.

Impact rating

High

Why is this important?

In order to make an objective assessment of your compliance with SQA quality assurance criteria, our representatives must have access to the relevant people and documentation.

SQA's essential requirements for all qualification types

You should include in documented procedures that you will comply with requests for access to SQA staff or appointees for quality assurance purposes, within the required timescales stated by SQA. If you do not comply with a request to carry out systems verification, this criterion outcome will be set to Red, which could result in sanctions being placed on your centre.

Additional requirements for regulated qualifications

Centres offering regulated qualifications must also allow access to SQA Accreditation, Ofqual or Qualifications Wales staff.

How do I apply the criterion?

SQA will make all requests for access to your SQA co-ordinator. The documented role and responsibilities of your SQA co-ordinator must include the management of SQA external quality assurance, including responding to requests from SQA within the required timescales.

You may also include procedures for the preparation and management of external verification visits in other documents, such as those on the role of the IV, or assessment and internal verification procedures.

Examples of evidence

- Documented procedures for handling quality assurance activity
- Roles and responsibilities
- Permission granted for SQA quality assurance representatives to obtain access

Criterion 1.10: Outcomes of external quality assurance must be disseminated to appropriate staff and any action points addressed within agreed timescales.

Impact rating

Medium

Why is this important?

The results of SQA external quality assurance activity must be made known to all relevant centre staff, to encourage positive aspects and good practice, and to make staff aware of any required action or recommendations. Staff must be clear about their roles in addressing action points, and any agreed timescales.

If SQA systems or qualification verification results in required actions, an agreed timescale will be set for addressing these. Sanctions may be applied if you do not fully meet the action points within this timescale.

Extensions will only be granted in exceptional circumstances, which must be notified to SQA as soon as they are known.

How do I apply the criterion?

You must have an effective process in place to share SQA quality assurance reports with staff who are involved with SQA qualifications. Quality assurance reports will always be sent to your SQA co-ordinator. The documented role of your SQA co-ordinator must include the responsibility to communicate the outcomes of external quality assurance activity to appropriate staff.

The documented role of your SQA co-ordinator (or other role within your centre responsible for quality assurance) must include the responsibility to ensure that any required actions are met within the agreed timescale.

Exceptional circumstances may arise which make it difficult to fully meet the required actions within the agreed timescale. Requests for extensions should be made at the earliest opportunity and before the agreed action date is reached.

Examples of evidence

- Roles and responsibilities, for example: SQA co-ordinator, internal verifier
- Copies of QA reports available on shared digital systems
- Corrective action log or report
- Minutes of relevant meetings

Category 2: Resource management

The centre procedures for managing resources must be documented, implemented and monitored to meet SQA requirements.

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

Impact rating

High

Why is this important?

To ensure the validity and integrity of the qualifications offered by SQA, it is important that assessors and IVs have the appropriate qualifications and occupational competence for qualifications they are assessing and / or verifying. Your awareness of these requirements and the processes you have in place for addressing them will be checked during systems verification.

SQA's essential requirements for all qualifications

Assessors and IVs must have the occupational experience and understanding, and any necessary qualifications specified in the SQA requirements for the qualification. The requirements can be found in the published guidance for each qualification, such as the assessment strategy, unit specification, operational handbook, arrangements document or group award strategy document.

Additional requirements for regulated qualifications

If no alternative timescale is stated in an assessment strategy, assessors and verifiers of regulated qualifications must achieve a relevant assessor / verifier qualification within 18 months of starting to practise.

Assessors and IVs for regulated qualifications must undertake and keep records of relevant continuing professional development (CPD) activities.

Additional requirements for qualifications regulated by Ofqual

You must inform SQA of any changes to assessors and internal verifiers involved in the delivery of internally-assessed qualifications regulated by Ofqual.

How do I apply the criterion?

You should have policies and procedures for recruitment, selection, training and deployment of sufficient numbers of staff as assessors, IVs and any others involved in the assessment process.

The qualification verifiers will check the specific qualifications and occupational competence of staff in relation to the qualifications they are verifying, and that CPD has been undertaken and recorded.

There should be evidence that requirements for qualification and experience have been addressed in recruitment and deployment of staff as assessors and IVs. Awareness of these requirements and the processes for addressing them will be checked in systems verification.

Examples of evidence

- Recruitment or selection policy or criteria
- Job descriptions or person specifications
- Information on processes for deployment of staff as assessors and IVs
- Job adverts
- Policies and procedures for training and development, CPD
- Training needs analyses
- Minutes of relevant meetings

Criterion 2.2: Assessors and internal verifiers (IVs) must be given induction training to SQA qualifications and requirements.

Impact rating

Medium

Why is this important?

It is important that all new assessors and IVs have an induction programme, so they are clear about their roles and responsibilities and are familiar with your centre's processes, procedures and documentation for the qualification. This is not only for staff new to the organisation, but for those who have been allocated these roles for the first time. Updates must also be provided to staff who have been inactive in the roles of assessors and IVs for some time, or where there have been any significant changes to your centre's procedures.

SQA's essential requirements for all qualification types

You must keep records of assessor and verifier induction.

Before undertaking any assessment activity, assessors and IVs must be provided with induction training which covers:

- the qualification assessment strategy
- the content of your candidate induction (see criterion 3.1)
- your internal verification procedures (see criterion 4.1)
- your malpractice policy or procedures (see criterion 1.5)
- your conflict of interest in assessment policy or procedures (see criterion 1.6)
- secure storage and transport of assessment materials (see criterion 4.5)
- your retention policy for candidate assessment evidence (see criterion 4.7)
- your retention policy for candidate records (see criterion 6.4)

How do I apply the criterion?

Assessor and verifier induction may be combined with your organisation's new staff induction, covering specific and generic information about your centre, but the role-specific information in the topics above must be included in full.

As a minimum, your record of assessor and verifier induction can be a checklist, but you may provide induction information using other methods, such as a staff handbook, an online module or a classroom presentation.

Examples of evidence

- Induction checklist (examples of checklist signed by assessor or IV)
- Staff handbook
- Staff induction pack

Additional support

An exemplar assessor and verifier induction checklist can be found in [Systems Approval and Verification: Support Materials](#).

Criterion 2.3: There must be a documented system for initial and ongoing reviews of assessment environments; equipment; and reference, learning and assessment materials.

Impact rating

Medium

Why is this important?

It is your responsibility to ensure that your centre has sufficient resources to enable all candidates to achieve the competences defined in the qualifications you offer.

You must review your resources regularly to ensure that they remain relevant, current and available in quantities appropriate to the qualification requirements and candidate numbers.

How do I apply the criterion?

Roles and responsibilities relating to approval for new qualifications must be documented.

Initial review of resources is part of the approval process.

When you seek approval for new SQA qualifications you must plan and allocate staff and physical resources, and learning, teaching and assessment materials, before you submit approval forms to SQA.

All communication between your centre and SQA about qualifications approval must be through the SQA co-ordinator. This is to ensure that the SQA co-ordinator is aware of additional approval applications and that these have been fully processed through your own internal procedures before being submitted to SQA.

Your internal procedures must reflect the size and complexity of your organisation.

All organisations must be able to evidence a link between resource and activity planning and making approval submissions to SQA.

You must document ongoing reviews of assessment environments and equipment, and of reference, learning and assessment materials. You may have one procedure for this, or it may be covered under a range of activities (eg staff meetings, internal verification, planning, feedback from staff and candidates).

Examples of evidence

Initial review:

- Roles and responsibilities for approval
- Documented internal procedure for approval
- Minutes of relevant meetings, recording templates for planning new qualifications and approval submissions
- Completed approval forms
- SQA approval reports
- Qualification verification reports after approval

Ongoing review:

- Documented system of review
- Minutes of relevant meetings
- Procurement records
- Library contents
- Internal verification records relating to review of assessments
- Records of additional sites

Criterion 2.5: All sites where candidates undertake assessments for SQA qualifications must be safe and appropriately resourced, and must provide access for candidates, staff and SQA personnel.

Impact rating

Medium

Why is this important?

Some assessment sites may be owned or managed by another organisation that has its own processes, policies and procedures. These are referred to in SQA guidance as 'alternative assessment sites'.

You must ensure that your quality assurance systems extend to all sites you use to assess candidates, and ensure that all alternative assessment sites have appropriate resources for each qualification you assess there, and that candidates have a consistent experience wherever they are located.

SQA verifiers will report to SQA any concerns they have about safety or access arrangements at an assessment site they have seen.

If your centre has, or intends to use, multiple campuses, then you must provide documentation that you will use to record checks undertaken. Access for SQA staff must be included in this.

Guidance on use of assessment sites owned by other organisations is available on SQA's website. This includes exemplar site checklists, which centres can use in their entirety, or use to ensure that their own documentation incorporates all the issues required by SQA.

How do I apply the criterion?

If you use alternative assessment sites (as defined above), you must provide documentation that records the checks you have undertaken to ensure their suitability.

You must ensure that access to alternative assessment sites is available at suitable times for candidates and staff.

You must also ensure that, if requested, access for SQA staff can be arranged. For some assessment sites it will not be possible to provide physical access — for example, oil rigs, construction sites or care facilities for vulnerable people. You should state this in any relevant documentation so that an alternative arrangement can be made with SQA.

Guidance on the use of assessment sites owned by other organisations is available on SQA's website. This includes:

- a declaration form for sites in other countries or nations
- exemplar site checklists, which you can use in their entirety, or use to ensure that your own documentation incorporates all the checks required by SQA

Examples of evidence

- Procedures for managing assessment sites
- Completed site checklists (or other documentation covering the same points)
- Signed agreements with other organisations that own sites you use for assessment

Additional support

[Guidance on the Use of Alternative Assessment Sites and Partnership Agreements](#) can be found on our website.

Category 3: Candidate support

Candidates are supported and guided through the qualifications for which they are entered.

Criterion 3.1: Candidate induction must include information about the SQA qualification and SQA requirements.

Impact rating

High

Why is this important?

Providing this information at induction ensures your candidates are aware of the procedures relevant to the qualification they are undertaking and know about their responsibilities and rights.

SQA's essential requirements for all qualification types

You must keep records of candidate induction. Before you submit entries, candidates must be provided with an induction which covers:

- the content and structure of the qualification
- the roles and responsibilities of the candidate, assessor, IV and external verifier
- the guidance and support available to them
- how and when assessment will take place and the opportunities for re-assessment (including charging policy, if relevant)
- how feedback on assessments will be provided
- your commitment to providing equal access to assessment
- how candidates with additional support needs or alternative assessment needs can request reasonable adjustments to assessments
- your malpractice policy and procedures, and any declarations of authenticity
- your complaint or grievance procedures
- your internal assessment appeals procedures
- notification that their personal information will be sent to SQA for the purposes of entries and certification, and maintenance of their record of achievement

How do I apply the criterion?

Induction materials may be provided to candidates in hard copy or made available for them to access electronically. Depending on the nature of the programme and mode of attendance, candidate induction may be as simple as providing these materials, or induction activities may take place over a longer period at the start of the programme.

Candidate induction checklists can be provided to ensure that staff cover all the required information, with candidates retaining their own record of what was covered. You may require candidates to sign the checklist to confirm they were provided with all the information.

Examples of evidence

- Policies and procedures for candidate guidance and support
- Candidate or learner agreement
- Induction pack or checklist
- Information on support services available
- List of reference or learning materials

Additional support

An exemplar candidate induction checklist can be found in [Systems Approval and Verification: Support Materials](#).

Criterion 3.4: Policies and procedures must give SQA candidates equal opportunities for assessment.

Impact rating

Medium

Why is this important?

As an SQA-approved centre, you must ensure that everyone eligible to take a qualification has an equal chance of benefitting from the services you provide. There must be no discriminatory barriers in the way of anyone who wants to take SQA qualifications.

SQA's specific requirements for all qualification types

There must be a documented commitment to equal access to assessment.

How do I apply the criterion?

SQA systems verification focuses on equal opportunities in relation to SQA qualifications and the candidates undertaking them.

Within the constraints of available resources and current legislation, you must ensure that no-one is discriminated against because of any of the protected characteristics:

- age
- disability
- gender
- gender re-assignment
- marriage and civil partnership
- pregnancy and maternity
- race and ethnicity
- religion and belief
- sexual orientation

You must cover all these protected characteristics in your policy.

SQA systems verification focuses on equal opportunities in relation to SQA qualifications and the candidates undertaking them. Any centre offering SQA qualifications must ensure that everyone eligible to take a qualification has an equal chance of benefitting from the services that the centre provides. There must be no discriminatory barriers in the way of any individual who wishes to take SQA qualifications.

Examples of evidence

- Policy statement on equal access to assessment
- Documented assessment arrangements procedure and / or statement
- Information on procedures and support services available in candidate induction handbook or materials
- Statement on roles and responsibilities of assessors
- Initial application form which requests disclosure of any disability and / or additional support needs

Criterion 3.5: Individual candidates' requirements for assessment arrangements must be discussed, identified, implemented and recorded.

Impact rating

Medium

Why is this important?

Assessment arrangements, or reasonable adjustments to assessment, allow candidates who are disabled, and/or who have been identified as having additional support needs or alternative assessment needs, appropriate arrangements to access the assessment without compromising its integrity.

Candidates are individuals with a diverse range of needs, and it is important that you consider their individual assessment needs when selecting the most appropriate method of assessment.

SQA's essential requirements for all qualification types

You must inform all candidates at induction that assessment arrangements to address additional support needs are available.

You must have documented procedures for managing assessment arrangements for both internal and external (where applicable) assessments, including roles and responsibilities for each stage of the procedures.

Procedures must cover:

- how you identify and evidence candidate needs
- how you determine the most appropriate assessment arrangement for each learner
- how you tailor decisions to the learner's needs across different subjects
- your process for internal verification of assessment arrangements decisions, to ensure that these decisions are consistent and aligned with SQA standards
- how you record assessment arrangements put in place
- how you make learners aware of the assessment arrangements they will be provided with in teaching, learning and assessments, and obtain their agreement
- how you consider information about existing assessment arrangements from other centres (where relevant under partnership arrangements for delivery of SQA qualifications)

Additional requirements for National Courses for external assessment

In addition to the requirements for all qualifications, for National Courses your procedures must cover:

- how you will notify SQA of assessment arrangement requests for external assessment, via the Assessment Arrangements Request (AAR) system.

Additional requirements for regulated qualifications

Reasonable adjustments are adjustments made to an assessment for a qualification to enable a disabled learner to demonstrate their knowledge, skills and understanding to the levels of attainment required by the specification for that qualification without compromising its integrity. This means that SQA does not need to make any adjustment to the competences being tested in an assessment and that it may not be possible to make reasonable adjustments where:

- an assessment requires the demonstration of a practical competence
- the assessment criteria have to be fully met
- the units or qualifications confer a licence to practise

You may need to contact SQA to request a reasonable adjustment in an assessment if the arrangement changes the published assessment requirements in any significant way (see guidance on SVQs and qualifications regulated by Ofqual and Qualifications Wales in the sources of support below).

How do I apply the criterion?

You must consider how you will address any barriers to accessing assessment your candidates may have, in order to provide an assessment environment that allows them to demonstrate competence they have acquired, without compromising the integrity of the assessment.

These barriers might include disability, identified learning difficulties, physical or sensory impairment, or mental health issues.

Many qualifications which are internally assessed have flexible assessment strategies which allow you to use different methods of assessment to generate candidate evidence, provided that this does not change the assessment standards and the competences being assessed.

For externally-assessed National Courses, or internally-assessed qualifications with specified forms of assessment, you will need to consider the identified needs of the candidate, as well as the assessment standards, to determine the most suitable assessment arrangements which allow them to demonstrate what they know and can do.

Advice on different types of assessment arrangements you could consider is available in the additional support section below.

Examples of evidence

- Documented assessment arrangements procedure
- Inclusion of roles and responsibilities for assessment arrangements in role descriptions of assessors and other relevant staff
- Information on procedures and support services available in candidate induction handbook or materials
- Initial application form which requests disclosure of any disability and / or additional support needs
- Records of the decision-making process for individual assessment arrangements, indicating the sources of evidence of need, and the types of candidate assessment evidence used to inform decision making on the appropriate assessment arrangements to put in place
- Examples of communicating and agreeing assessment arrangements with candidates
- Evidence of agreement obtained from candidates to putting an assessment arrangement in place
- Records of your approach to internal verification / authorisation of individual assessment arrangements, including your approach to sampling these (note that verification of 100% of assessment arrangement decisions is not required)

Additional support

Information on assessment arrangements is available in the [Guide to Assessment](#).

Guidance on writing assessment arrangement procedures can be found in [Systems Approval and Verification: Support Materials](#).

Information on assessment arrangements for National Courses and external assessments: [Assessment arrangements resources](#).

[Information on Reasonable Adjustments for Qualifications regulated by Ofqual and Qualifications Wales](#)

[Information on Reasonable Adjustments for SVQs and alternative competence-based qualifications regulated by SQA Accreditation](#)

Criterion 3.6: Candidate complaints must be handled in line with a documented complaints procedure which meets SQA requirements.

Impact rating

Medium

Why is this important?

SQA wants to ensure that candidates undertaking our qualifications are provided with a complaints or grievance process that allows them to raise concerns relating to assessment. A robust complaint handling procedure will provide candidates with a structured mechanism to raise assessment-related concerns with your centre and allow investigation and response or resolution.

SQA's essential requirements for all qualification types

You must provide candidates undertaking SQA qualifications with a complaints or grievance process that allows them to raise concerns relating to assessment.

The procedure can be invoked at any stage of a candidate's qualification and should be used for complaints about assessment-related matters. However, it must be clear that disagreement about academic judgement will not be handled through the complaints procedure and must be processed through the appeals procedure (see criterion 4.8).

If a candidate remains dissatisfied at the end of your centre's complaints procedure, you must provide full and clear information about the types of independent external review available following completion of your own complaints procedure. For assessment-related complaints, you must tell candidates that they may have the right to escalate their complaint to SQA as the awarding body, and provide them with details of how to do this.

Additional requirements for regulated qualifications

Candidates undertaking regulated qualifications also have the right to ask the relevant regulator (SQA Accreditation, Ofqual or Qualifications Wales) to look at their complaint if they remain dissatisfied after your final response has been issued, and they have also exhausted SQA awarding body's complaints procedure. You must state this in your centre's procedures and explain it to candidates when providing your complaint decision if you deliver regulated qualifications.

How do I apply the criterion?

You must have a documented complaints or grievance procedure and ensure that this is included as part of candidate induction. Reasonable timescales must be attached to each stage of the process. There must be at least two people who candidates can raise complaints with initially. Your procedures must also include mechanisms for:

- telling candidates about the complaints procedure
- notifying the candidate of the outcome and subsequent actions
- appropriate signposting for external review
- recording and retaining records

Where the candidates are employees of your centre, your documented procedure may be staff grievance procedures, but the escalation process described in the SQA requirements above would still apply and you must make this clear to candidates.

You must inform all candidates that SQA can consider complaints from any candidate about assessment-related issues — including broader issues such as the conduct of and environment for assessment — but only if the candidate has already exhausted your centre's complaints procedure, or the centre has unreasonably failed to apply its procedure correctly.

SQA will not consider complaints about the wider experience of being a student (such as student support services, funding, student facilities).

Disagreement about academic judgement will not be handled through the complaints procedure and must be processed through the appeals procedure (see criterion 4.8).

You must analyse complaints for trends, to inform quality improvement in your centre.

Details of any complaints or grievances must be logged and retained for review by SQA quality assurance staff.

Complaints ombudsmen

If your centre falls within the jurisdiction of a complaints ombudsman — for example the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) — you should be aware of any additional requirements to meet statutory obligations.

Examples of evidence

- Documented complaints procedure, including statements of when candidates can complain to SQA
- Procedure contained within candidate induction materials
- Logs of complaints received, and action taken
- Analysis of complaints received and any actions arising

Additional support

Guidance on writing complaints procedures can be found in [Systems Approval and Verification: Support Materials](#).

Category 4: Internal assessment and verification

The centre's internal assessment and verification procedures must be documented, implemented and monitored to meet qualification and SQA requirements.

Criterion 4.1: Internal assessment and verification procedures must be documented and monitored to meet SQA requirements.

Impact rating

Medium

Why is this important?

Internal verification is a crucial element of SQA's quality assurance. It ensures that all candidates entered for the same qualification are assessed fairly and consistently to the specified standard.

SQA's essential requirements for all qualifications

Your internal verification procedures must include the three stages of internal verification, which are pre-assessment, during assessment, and post-assessment.

How do I apply the criterion?

It is a requirement of being an SQA-approved centre that you operate an effective and documented internal quality assurance system. You must regularly review the effectiveness of your procedures and make any necessary improvements. You must also ensure that changes made by SQA are adopted. Your documented internal verification policy and procedures must cover the following:

Stage 1 (Pre-assessment)

At the pre-assessment stage, your procedures must describe how you:

- check assessment instruments, including SQA-devised assessments, for validity, currency and fitness for purpose
- submit centre-devised assessments to SQA for prior verification, where appropriate
- ensure all assessors and IVs have a common understanding of the standards required, even when assessments have been published by SQA

Stage 2 (During assessment)

At the during assessment stage, your procedures must describe:

- how and when you internally verify candidate evidence

- the documentation you use to record assessment and verification activities
- your schedule of assessor and IV meetings and how these are recorded
- how you record standardisation activities
- how you minimise the risk of plagiarism
- the assessment and internal verification records you keep

Sampling candidate evidence

Within this stage you must also state your centre's sampling strategy.

You should consider a risk-based approach to sampling which takes account of factors such as:

- new or inexperienced assessors and IVs
- new or revised qualifications
- revised assessment instruments
- previous quality assurance reports
- methods of assessment
- assessment location
- mode of delivery

Stage 3 (Post-assessment)

At the post-assessment stage your procedures must state how you review and update your assessment and internal verification processes.

Examples of evidence

- Documented internal verification procedure
- Minutes or action notes of assessor / IV meetings
- Records of standardisation
- Records of sampling activity
- Schedules of internal verification activities
- Documented feedback to assessors
- Review records such as action notes
- Internal audit review records
- Document control records logging any changes to procedures
- Notification to staff of changes to procedures

Additional support

[Internal Verification: A Guide for Centres](#)

[HNVQ Internal Verification Toolkit](#)
[Guide to Assessment](#)

Criterion 4.5: Assessment materials and candidate evidence (including examination question papers, scripts and electronically-stored evidence) must be stored and transported securely.

Impact rating

High

Why is this important?

This is to ensure that the security and integrity of the assessment material is maintained. In particular, this relates to assessments where a candidate would gain an unfair advantage by seeing the assessment in advance and the assessment is carried out under controlled conditions (for example an SQA Advanced graded unit examination).

This includes both assessments developed within your centre and assessments produced and published by SQA.

Candidate evidence must be stored securely, to minimise the risks of malpractice and to ensure that it is available for internal and external verification.

SQA's essential requirements for all qualifications

You must make all staff aware that any breach in the security of the assessment materials published on the secure site must be reported immediately to SQA.

How do I apply the criterion?

Your arrangements for secure storage and transport must be documented and covered in assessor and IV induction (see criterion 2.2).

You must have suitable practical arrangements in place at all assessment sites for the secure storage of assessment materials and candidate evidence. Transport arrangements within and between assessment sites must also ensure the security of the materials.

SQA's secure website for centres is an online resource containing assessment exemplar content and other secure information used in the delivery of our qualifications. To access the secure site, you must be approved for qualifications which have materials on the secure site. A username and password are required to access the secure site, and these are issued to SQA co-ordinators.

Access to the secure site for assessors and IVs is granted at the discretion of the SQA co-ordinator. It is your responsibility to ensure that the security of assessment materials

accessed from the secure site is maintained within your centre. You must document roles and responsibilities and procedures for notifying SQA immediately of any breach of security at your centre involving SQA assessment materials.

You must also have in place appropriate procedures for ensuring that security of assessment is maintained when using technology for remote assessment, including controls on the assessment environment and the use of remote invigilation, where appropriate.

If you use an e-portfolio system you should include information or a link to the specific user guide and security requirements.

When using SQA's digital assessment platform SOLAR, you must only create valid candidates with a Scottish Candidate Number (SCN) and you must only schedule summative assessments for valid candidates. Scheduling invalid candidates for a summative assessment in SOLAR may constitute malpractice.

Examples of evidence

- Physical evidence of secure storage of assessment materials and candidate assessments
- Documented procedure for storing assessment materials, including notifying SQA of any breaches of security
- Documented roles and responsibilities, eg of SQA co-ordinator, assessors
- Assessor and IV induction checklists

Additional support

Guidance on writing procedures for the security of internal assessments can be found in [Systems Approval and Verification: Support Materials](#).

[Advice for centres in using technology to support assessment remotely](#)

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

Impact rating

High

Why is this important?

Candidate assessment evidence must be retained for defined periods for the purposes of internal and external verification, and in case of any resulting queries, candidate internal assessment appeals or suspected malpractice.

SQA's essential requirements for all qualifications

You must retain candidate assessment evidence for the periods set out in the [Evidence Retention Requirements tables](#) on the SQA website.

If an appeal against an internal assessment result is made, you must retain records, including all materials and candidate evidence, until the appeal has been resolved.

If an investigation of suspected malpractice is carried out, you must retain related records and documentation for three years.

If an appeal to SQA against the outcome of a malpractice investigation is made, you must retain assessment records for six years.

If an investigation involving a potential criminal prosecution or civil claim is carried out, records and documentation must be retained for six years after the case and any appeal has been heard. If there is any doubt about whether criminal or civil proceedings will take place, you must keep records for the full six-year period.

Additional requirements for regulated qualifications

If an appeal is made to SQA against an internal assessment result in a regulated qualification, assessment and internal verification records must be retained for six years thereafter, unless there is a legitimate reason to retain records for a further period.

If an investigation is made of suspected malpractice in a regulated qualification, you must retain related records and documentation for six years.

How do I apply the criterion?

You must note the evidence retention requirements for the specific qualifications you are approved to offer. These are displayed on the Evidence Retention Requirements Tables on the SQA website.

You must document the specific retention requirements which apply to your centre and cover these in induction for assessors and IVs (see criterion 2.2).

Candidate assessment evidence may be in electronic, paper, video or audio formats. Whatever the format, it must be stored securely (see criterion 4.5).

There are separate requirements for retention of records of assessment outcomes and candidate achievement (see criterion 6.4).

Examples of evidence

- Documented retention policy
- Assessment policy and procedures including retention of evidence
- Assessor and internal verifier induction checklist
- Description of the arrangements centres have in place for ensuring SQA verifiers have appropriate access to candidate evidence during verification events
- Physical evidence of storage of candidate assessment evidence

Additional support

[Evidence Retention Requirements tables](#)

Criterion 4.8: Internal assessment appeals must be handled in line with a documented procedure which meets SQA requirements.

Impact rating

Medium

Why is this important?

If a candidate disagrees with an internal assessment decision, they must have the right to appeal. They must know the grounds on which an appeal can be made, and the procedure for doing so.

Additional requirements for regulated qualifications

Candidates undertaking regulated qualifications have additional stages of appeal:

- to SQA (the awarding body), once the centre's appeals procedure has been exhausted
- to SQA Accreditation, Ofqual or Qualifications Wales, once SQA's appeals procedure has been exhausted, if they feel that the centre and / or SQA (the awarding body) has not dealt with the appeal appropriately

SQA Accreditation, Ofqual or Qualifications Wales cannot overturn assessment decisions or academic judgements but may investigate the effectiveness of your centre's and / or SQA's appeals process and require corrective action.

How do I apply the criterion?

You must have a documented internal appeals procedure and ensure that this is included as part of candidate induction (see criterion 3.1).

Reasonable timescales must be attached to each stage of the process and stated in your procedure. Your appeals procedure must include mechanisms for:

- informing candidates about the procedure
- notifying the candidate of the outcome and subsequent actions
- recording and retaining records

There must be at least three internal stages documented in your procedure, for example:

Stage 1: the candidate's first point of contact is the assessor, then, if still unresolved...

Stage 2: the IV, then, if still unresolved...

Stage 3: an independent third party (part of organisation, or another centre, but not SQA)

Details of any appeals must be retained for review by SQA quality assurance staff.

Examples of evidence

- Documented appeals procedure, with appropriate stages
- Procedure contained within candidate induction materials
- Log and records of all internal assessment appeals

Additional support

Guidance on writing internal assessment appeals procedures can be found in [Systems Approval and Verification: Support Materials](#).

[Centre guide to SQA appeals procedures](#)

[The Appeals Process: Information for Centres](#)

Category 5: External assessment

The centre's external assessment procedures must be documented, implemented and monitored to meet qualification and SQA requirements.

Note: This category only applies where centres are delivering SQA qualifications with assessments set and marked by SQA. In the main, this will be National Courses (National 5, Highers and Advanced Highers) with external examinations, and external coursework in some cases.

There are very few vocational qualifications with external assessment, and, for centres that only deliver internally-assessed qualifications, these criteria will be marked as Not Applicable in the systems verification report.

Criterion 5.1: Assessment evidence must be the candidates' own work, generated under SQA's required conditions.

Impact rating

High

Why is this important?

Any irregularity in the conduct of an external examination can have a serious impact on all candidates taking the examination, not just those in one centre.

Malpractice can occur where coursework submitted to SQA for marking has not been generated under the correct conditions of assessment and authenticated as the candidate's own work. Sanctions can be imposed as a result.

SQA's essential requirements for centres delivering National Courses or other qualifications with external assessment

Conditions of assessment will be qualification-specific and must be communicated and adhered to within your centre. You must take appropriate steps to prevent malpractice occurring and to ensure that candidate evidence is authenticated.

You must ensure that appropriate resources are made available so that no candidates are disadvantaged.

How do I apply this criterion?

You must be able to demonstrate understanding and the correct implementation of SQA requirements for:

- exam conditions

- secure storage and handling of examination papers and candidates' completed examination scripts and coursework for submission
- managing SQA Visiting Assessment (for some subjects with performance-based externally-assessed coursework)
- submitting coursework to SQA for external marking
- online testing (if applicable)

You must have clearly allocated responsibilities, eg those of SQA co-ordinators, exams officers and invigilators.

You must also provide documented evidence that you have assessed and reviewed accommodation and facilities to ensure they are appropriate for all candidates, and that the required resources are in place for scheduled external assessments (eg IT, recording equipment).

Examples of evidence

- Roles and responsibilities, eg of the SQA co-ordinator, exams officer, invigilators
- Guidance to candidates on malpractice, eg at induction, signed candidate disclaimers on coursework
- Examination procedure documentation
- Externally-assessed coursework procedures
- Online testing procedures (where relevant)
- Minutes of relevant meetings
- Staff emails and memos
- Invigilator guidance, roles and responsibilities
- Procedures for checking candidate identity at examinations
- Handbook for invigilators
- ICT requests (eg for assessment arrangements, support for online testing)

Additional support

[Guidance on Conditions of Assessment for Coursework](#)

Qualification-specific conditions of assessment stated in the [Course Specifications on the SQA website](#)

Criterion 5.2: Assessment materials and candidate evidence, (including examination question papers, scripts and electronically-stored evidence) must be securely stored and transported

Impact rating

High

Why is this important?

This is to ensure that the security and integrity of the examination material is maintained throughout the examination diet.

SQA's essential requirements for centres delivering National Courses with external assessment

For the duration of the examination diet, question papers and any other confidential examination materials must be stored securely at your centre's registered address in a secure room solely assigned to examinations. Only persons authorised by the head of centre may be allowed access to this facility.

You will be required to complete and submit to SQA a self-assessment form about your secure storage facilities and arrangements for National Course examination question papers and materials every year.

You must also inform SQA if your arrangements for secure storage of SQA examination papers and candidate evidence change.

You must inform SQA immediately if the security of question papers or confidential examination materials is breached.

How do I apply this criterion?

You must have suitable practical arrangements in place at all assessment sites that are used for external assessment.

You must document:

- the roles and responsibilities of relevant staff
- how you will manage the secure storage of examination question papers and materials, from the point when the papers and materials are delivered to your centre, until candidate scripts are uplifted or returned to SQA

Your transport arrangements within and between assessment sites must ensure the security of the materials.

SQA staff and appointees have the right of access at any time to your centre's secure storage facilities. It is your responsibility to plan and arrange for the possibility of visits by SQA staff or appointees, as visits may be made without prior notice.

Examples of evidence

- Completed self-assessments of your secure storage facilities and arrangements
- Physical evidence of secure storage of examination materials and candidate assessments
- Documented procedure for: storing assessment materials, notifying SQA of any breaches of security, checking examination materials upon receipt, and ensuring that examination scripts and assessments are stored and dispatched securely
- Roles and responsibilities, eg of SQA co-ordinator, exams officer, invigilators

Additional support

Secure storage self-assessment pro forma stating SQA's requirements.

[Joint Council for Qualifications: Instructions for conducting examinations](#)

Criterion 5.3: The centre must submit, where appropriate, within published timelines, results services requests

Impact rating

Medium

Why is this important?

The Examination Exceptional Circumstances Consideration Service (EECCS) supports learners who have been:

- unable to attend the exam
- or whose performance in an exam has been affected by a personal circumstance, or an unplanned incident on the day.

This is a pre-certification service that covers situations where an exceptional circumstance has impacted a learner's performance **on the day of an exam**.

The Appeals Service, on the other hand, allows candidates to request a marking review of externally marked examinations after they have received their certificates.

SQA's essential requirements for centres delivering National Courses with external assessment

You must ensure that both candidates and centre staff involved in external assessments are aware of these services and follow the required processes and timescales.

How do I apply this criterion?

You must keep up to date with the current SQA arrangements for exceptional circumstances and appeals and ensure that these are communicated to your staff and candidates.

You must put in place documented procedures for handling requests from your candidates for these services and for collating the necessary information and submitting it to SQA within the required timescales.

Examples of evidence

- Documented processes for managing and submitting exceptional circumstances requests and appeals to SQA.
- Roles and responsibilities of staff which include: gathering evidence, making and approving recommendations on submissions to be made, submitting requests and appeals.

- Information provided to candidates in induction materials about exceptional circumstances and appeals services for qualifications with externally-assessed elements.

Additional support

[Exceptional circumstances](#)

[Appeals service](#)

Category 6: Data management

The centre procedures for supplying complete, current and accurate information to SQA for the purposes of registration, entries and certification must be documented, implemented and monitored to meet SQA requirements.

Criterion 6.1: Candidates' personal data submitted by centres to SQA must accurately reflect the current status of the candidate.

Impact rating

High

Why is this important?

SQA holds personal data on candidates in order to identify and certificate candidates.

SQA may have to contact candidates directly and therefore must have their home addresses or other personal contact details (email addresses or phone numbers).

SQA's essential requirements for all qualification types

Your centre must have a documented data management policy and abide by the Data Protection principles in both the collection of data for transmission to SQA and in the dissemination of data from SQA.

Candidates must be informed that their personal data will be sent to SQA for the purposes of entering them for an SQA qualification, for certification and for maintenance of their record of attainment. SQA's [Privacy Statement](#) must be provided to candidates so that they can be made aware how SQA will use the candidate information collected.

If you enter the centre address for the receipt of candidates' certificates you must either:

- reinstate the candidate's home address as soon as possible after receipt of the certificate, or
- ensure that other personal contact details (email address and / or phone number) are entered for the candidate.

You must have the permission of the candidate to receive the certificate on their behalf and pass it on to them.

You must have a documented procedure in place stating your approach to this.

How do I apply the criterion?

It is essential that you have documented processes in place that will ensure that complete, current and accurate data is supplied to SQA.

Your procedure must cover:

Personal data

You provide personal data to SQA when you make a Registration Creation.

'Registration' is the term used by SQA for the process of recording candidate details (ie full name, date of birth, gender, home address and/or other personal contact details) onto SQA Connect.

Your procedures must take account of the fact that registration is a one-time only process.

Your centre must check whether candidates have a Scottish Candidate Number (SCN) before sending their details for initial registration. If a candidate already has an SCN, you may have to update the candidate's personal data, for example to enter their current address.

Appropriate centre staff must be aware of, and implement, your centre's step-by-step procedures for data transfer between the centre and SQA, to ensure that accurate certification takes place.

GDPR and candidate notification

SQA expects all centres to comply with the General Data Protection Regulation. Candidates must be informed that their personal details will be passed to SQA (as described above in the SQA requirements). This could be included as a statement on a candidate application or enrolment form, or be an item on a candidate induction checklist. SQA does not require centres to obtain consent for this processing.

Centre use of personal data

Personal information supplied by SQA is for use as an SQA-approved centre only. It must not be used for marketing purposes, or any purpose which could reasonably be objected to by a candidate. You must hold information securely (this applies to electronic files and hard copies) and provide details about your centre's security measures and access controls to candidates.

Examples of evidence

- Documented data management policy and procedures
- Data protection policy
- Roles and responsibilities, eg of data management staff

- Signed candidate information or data exchange agreements
- Check box on electronic registration
- Application and / or enrolment forms
- Information to candidates, eg at induction, about notifying the centre of any change of address or other personal details

Additional support

Guidance on writing data management procedures and an example data management flowchart can be found in [Systems Approval and Verification: Support Materials](#).

Criterion 6.2: Data on candidate entries submitted by centres to SQA must accurately reflect the current status of the candidate and the qualification.

Impact rating

High

Why is this important?

Your centre must notify SQA of registered candidates undertaking units and awards as soon as possible after they have enrolled on their programme.

This is to ensure that:

- learners undertaking SQA qualifications are entered as SQA candidates, with the associated responsibilities and entitlements
- SQA can plan qualification verification visits effectively
- there is accurate certification of candidates when results are submitted

Entry information must be kept up to date to avoid delays in the release of certificates.

SQA's essential requirements for all qualification types

You must have a process in place to ensure that your centre is approved to offer the qualification before starting delivery and making entries, and to check that the correct unit and group award codes are used for entries.

You must have a process in place for checking the status of the qualification, to ensure that you are able to submit entries, and that the candidates can be result and certificated, on time. Entries cannot be accepted for qualifications which your centre is not approved to offer, or where the qualification is finished.

Candidate entries must be made as soon as possible after their enrolment on the programme

You must not submit entries and results for the same candidate at the same time. Exceptions to this are courses of a very short duration, eg between one and three days. Examples include Emergency First Aid at Work and Street Works Reassessment.

You must update candidate data at the recorded completion date, by submitting results, withdrawing the candidate (from units and group awards, as appropriate) or, if a candidate has been granted an extension, extending the completion date.

If you deliver qualifications which are verified as group awards rather than as individual units (such as HNs, Advanced Certificates and Diplomas, SVQs and Skills for Work

courses), you must submit a candidate's entry for the group award at the start of their study.

Additional requirements for regulated qualifications

Regulated qualifications (including all SVQs) are accredited for a finite period. This is known as the accreditation period. The accreditation period has a start date, a lapsing date and an end (or finish) date. The qualification is live between the start date and the lapsing date.

Candidates can only be entered on the qualification until the lapsing date. The lapsing period is the period between the lapsing date and the end (or finish) date. Certificates cannot be issued after the end date. This means that any candidates who are entered on the qualification must be entered before the lapsing date and must have successfully completed it by the end date.

Some qualifications have pre-set lapsing periods, eg two years for an SVQ 2.

Your centre must ensure that candidates seeking certification for a full SVQ, a Workplace Core Skill unit or the assessor / verifier units are entered for the award at least 10 weeks before a claim for certification is made ('10-week rule')

How do I apply the criterion?

Entry data is supplied to SQA initially as an Entries Creation. As candidates progress through qualifications, data is submitted to SQA as an Entries Update. It is essential that you have documented processes in place to ensure that complete, current and accurate data is supplied to SQA.

Appropriate centre staff must be aware of, and implement, your centre's step-by-step procedures for data transfer between the centre and SQA to ensure that accurate certification takes place.

You must observe the relevant completion dates, finish dates and lapsing periods for qualifications. You can find these details through the Navigator function of SQA Connect.

Based on your qualification type and client base, your centre must make decisions on when and how often data cleansing and updating should take place (for example, to extend completion dates where a candidate has an agreed extension, or to withdraw entries when the candidate is no longer active).

Procedures for data cleansing must be included in your documented system of data management.

SQA Navigator can be used to check the approval status of qualifications, and the completion dates and entry status codes of candidates. The qualifications have one of five status codes:

Status code 1 — open entry

Status code 2 — withdrawn entry

Status code 3 — provisional result

Status code 4 — final result

Status code 5 — certificated result

Examples of evidence

- Documented data management policy and procedures, including procedures for gathering and submitting entries and cleansing entry data
- Internal records of entries

Criterion 6.3: Data on candidate results submitted by centres to SQA must accurately reflect the current status of the candidate and the qualification.

Impact rating

High

Why is this important?

This is to ensure that results are submitted at the appropriate time in order to:

- allow SQA the opportunity to carry out quality assurance
- give SQA sufficient time for the smooth operation of certification processes
- prevent any unnecessary delays to candidates receiving the certificate that they are entitled to

SQA's essential requirements for all qualification types

Qualification-specific requirements for the submission of candidate results must be communicated and adhered to within your centre.

Additional requirements for regulated qualifications

For regulated qualifications, certificates cannot be issued after the SQA finish date. This means that any candidates who are entered on the qualification must have successfully completed it and been resultd by the finish date (see criterion 6.2 for an explanation of the finish date).

You cannot claim certification for SVQ awards, Workplace Core Skill units and assessor and verifier units within 10 weeks of the entry date of the qualification ('10-week rule'). This does not apply to individual SVQ units or short courses (eg one day courses).

Additional requirements for centres delivering National Courses with external assessment

There are specific requirements and published key dates for National Qualifications, and if your centre is approved to offer these qualifications you must note and adhere to these. These are updated every year and can be found on SQA Connect.

How do I apply the criterion?

It is essential that you have documented processes in place to ensure that complete, current and accurate data is supplied to SQA. Appropriate centre staff must be aware of, and implement, your centre's step-by-step procedures for data transfer between the centre and SQA to ensure that accurate certification takes place.

Your procedures must include details of how results, once they have been confirmed through your centre's internal quality assurance processes, will be passed from assessors or IVs to data management staff, with timescales for the processing of results.

You must include in your procedures that you will immediately notify Centre Support at SQA of any incorrect results submitted to SQA by your centre. SQA will revoke any incorrect certificates that have been issued as a result of incorrect results.

Examples of evidence

- Data management policy and procedures
- Assessment and internal verification procedures
- Resulting records

Criterion 6.4: There must be an effective and documented system for the accurate recording, storage and retention of assessment records, internal verification records and candidate records of achievement in line with SQA requirements.

Impact rating

Medium

Why is this important?

This is to ensure that accurate records of candidate achievement are retained securely to assist any future quality assurance enquiries and to minimise any risk of wrongful certification claims.

It also helps to maintain standards by allowing for the review of assessment over time.

SQA's essential requirements for all qualification types

Following completion of SQA qualifications, your centre must keep, for one calendar year, the following records:

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

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

If an investigation of suspected malpractice is carried out, you must retain related records and documentation for three years.

If an appeal to SQA against the outcome of a malpractice investigation is made, assessment records must be retained for six years.

If an investigation involving a potential criminal prosecution or civil claim is carried out, records and documentation must be retained for six years after the case and any appeal has been heard. If there is in any doubt about whether criminal or civil proceedings will take place, your centre should keep records for the full six-year period.

Additional requirements for regulated qualifications

Centres delivering Ofqual or Qualifications Wales regulated qualifications must retain records of candidate assessment for at least six years.

If an appeal against an internal assessment result is made, you must retain records, including all materials and evidence, until the appeal has been resolved.

If an appeal is made to SQA against an internal assessment result in a regulated qualification, assessment and internal verification records must be retained for six years thereafter, unless there is a legitimate reason to retain records for a further period.

How do I apply the criterion?

You must document your system for the accurate recording and storage of candidate records, including required retention periods, within your data management procedures. The systems verifier may ask you to provide physical evidence of the secure storage of your records.

Examples of evidence

- Details of candidate assessment, including the name of the assessor, location, date and outcome
- Results sheets or records
- Secure storage policy
- Physical evidence of secure storage
- Records of internal verification activity
- Certificates claimed

Additional support

[Retention of candidate assessment records table](#)