



Guide to development and validation for centres with devolved authority

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1.0 Introduction

The purpose of this document is to assist centres with devolved authority to validate a new, or revise an existing:

- Award (AWD)
- National Certificate (NC)
- National Progression Award (NPA)
- Higher National Certificate (HNC)
- Higher National Diploma (HND)
- Professional Development Award (PDA)

This document is intended to be a reference guide for college quality managers and course teams regarding documentation to be submitted to Qualifications Scotland in order to avoid any unnecessary costs or delays with the development, validation and operationalisation of the group award.

More detailed information, forms and guidance documents referred to in this publication are available from [Qualification Development: Toolkit for Centres](#).

2.0 Development

2.1 Working together

Before you start any development, you should let Qualifications Scotland know your intentions using the Development Opportunity Form (DO/1). The benefits of doing so include:

- ensuring there is no duplication or overlap with other proposed or current developments
- scheduling Qualifications Scotland officer time to support you with the development, validation and operationalisation of the group award and any associated units that do not currently exist
- avoiding delays with unit/group award coding on Qualifications Scotland's Awards Processing System (APS)

Centres with devolved authority have full responsibility for validation (including all associated costs) using their own college systems. Section 11 in this document provides details of key tasks associated with the validation of a group award, which you might find useful to include in your own college systems.

2.2 Unit development

When considering the content of the group award, the Qualification Design Team (QDT) should, in the first instance, assess the suitability of existing provision. This will avoid the unnecessary creation of units and will reduce development costs.

Details of existing units are available in the [Catalogue of National Qualifications](#) and the [Catalogue of Higher National Qualifications](#).

Centres can develop National and Higher National unit specifications for Qualifications Scotland to validate. Before starting any such development, centres should submit a rationale for it to Qualifications Scotland using the DO/1. Normally, only unique units from specialist centres will be considered.

2.3 Unit assessment support materials

You should consider whether assessment materials need to be developed to help accurate interpretation of the unit standards. If so, you should also consider what the most appropriate method would be, such as an assessment support pack or using Solar.

3.0 Validation — an overview

3.1 The purpose of validation

Validation is the quality assurance process that Qualifications Scotland uses to ensure that all new, revised or amended qualifications are valid, credible and fit for purpose. It is a process of peer-group review that focuses on the justification for, and coherence of, a proposed qualification and its technical specification. It confirms that any new qualification fully satisfies criteria defined in Qualifications Scotland's quality elements. The criteria are:

- The qualification conforms to the Qualifications Scotland design rules and principles and other technical requirements which are current at the time of its validation.
- There is a demonstrable need for the qualification which fills a gap in the qualifications framework and makes a valuable and unique contribution to Qualifications Scotland's portfolio of qualifications.
- The qualification is accessible to all learners who could potentially achieve it.
- The qualification requires a learner to demonstrate significant, achievable outcomes in a recognised curricular or vocational area.
- The qualification is coherent and its title accurately reflects its content.

3.2 Validation of unit specifications

Centres are responsible for the subject accuracy of the unit content, a technical edit that confirms compliance with the document *Writing National and Higher National Units — Guide for Writers*, and an equality review against the protected characteristics (disability, race, age, religion or belief, sex, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, or sexual orientation).

It is recommended that the centre liaise with the Qualifications Scotland lead officer throughout the unit development process to avoid any potential delays at validation stage. The Qualifications Scotland lead officer will be able to provide guidance on whether the units are on track to meet Qualifications Scotland's technical and validation requirements.

When unit(s) are ready for validation, the centre should submit electronic copies of the unit specification(s), technical edit and equality review. The Qualifications Scotland lead officer will review all materials and advise the centre of any necessary amendments.

3.3 Validation of graded unit specifications (HN only)

When the graded unit(s) are ready for validation, the centre should submit electronic copies of the graded unit specification(s), technical edit and equality review to the Qualifications Scotland lead officer. The Qualifications Scotland lead officer will review all material and advise the centre of any necessary amendments.

While the development process for graded and non-graded units is the same, the validation process differs because graded units are specific to a group award, and reflect the principal aims of that group award. This means that they will also clearly reflect the uniqueness of the title of the group award. For this reason, graded units should be developed once the mandatory units for the group award have been confirmed. These are validated at the same time as the group award by the validation panel instead of the Qualifications Scotland lead officer.

3.4 Validating group awards

The validation method used by Qualifications Scotland is determined by various factors including specialism, size and structure. As a general rule, one of the following methods will be used:

- Group awards which contain any new units are normally validated by a meeting of subject experts, independent of the QDT.
- Group awards made up entirely of existing units may be validated by Qualifications Scotland officer decision or by a meeting of subject experts, independent of the QDT.

The Qualifications Scotland lead officer can advise you on the most appropriate validation method for a particular development.

Where a meeting of subject experts is chosen, the centre is responsible for hosting the validation meeting and all associated costs. Important note: an Qualifications Scotland officer must be included in the validation process to ensure compliance with Qualifications Scotland's validation criteria.

Note: HNC/Ds cannot be delivered outside Scotland, therefore centres developing HNC/D group awards must make it clear to Qualifications Scotland if they intend to deliver and assess an HNC/D equivalent (an SQA Advanced Certificate or Diploma) outside Scotland.

4.0 Inclusion of units on Qualifications Scotland's Awards Processing System (APS)

The Qualifications Scotland lead officer will arrange coding of any new or revised units as part of the unit validation process.

Centres with devolved authority for validating group awards should complete form DAVAL1 from the Toolkit and email it to Qualifications Scotland along with a copy of the signed validation report, validated group award specification and graded units (if applicable).

Qualifications Scotland cannot code a group award until all of the above deliverables have been received. All units within the group award are coded on APS, and unit specifications are available on Qualifications Scotland's website.

Where all deliverables are confirmed as being in place, Qualifications Scotland will progress coding of group awards. However, if all deliverables are not in place, Qualifications Scotland will liaise with the centre contact to agree a solution and timescales.

5.0 Promotion

Once coded on APS, units and group awards are promoted through the following channels:

- qualification page on Qualifications Scotland's website
- Qualifications Scotland's weekly Centre News
- appropriate product catalogue
- annual report

6.0 The approval process

Approval to deliver the newly validated group award is a separate process.

Further information on the approval process is available at [Deliver another qualification](#).

Qualifications Scotland's quality assurance process, including Qualifications Scotland's Systems and Qualification Approval Guide, can be found at [Quality assurance](#).

If your centre has devolved authority and the newly validated group award is devolved, you should follow your own centre's internal approval process. You should then submit a completed [Devolved Authority Qualification Approval Application Form](#) to request the validated group award be added to your centre's approval list.

7.0 Informing the Students Awards Agency for Scotland (SAAS)

Once your centre is approved on APS, Qualifications Scotland inform SAAS.

8.0 Maintenance

The maintenance of a group award begins as soon as it has been coded on APS and centres begin to deliver it.

Through delivering the group award, your centre may come across issues around the structure and content. For example, you may wish to suggest including an alternative unit to meet a specific need, or amending a unit specification to clarify, simplify or correct something. External verifiers may also identify assessment issues with the qualification through their verification visits to centres.

It is important that issues surrounding delivery and assessment of a qualification are identified, considered and addressed. **Maintenance is about ensuring a qualification remains fit for purpose.**

Change requests to existing units and group awards should be communicated to Qualifications Scotland through a DAVAL2 form available from the [Qualification Development: Toolkit for Centres](#).

9.0 Group award review

Qualifications Scotland seeks to maintain a balanced portfolio of qualifications that is inclusive, addresses progression needs and reflects Scotland's economic, social, political and cultural needs. To ensure this, all existing qualifications, both national and centre-devised (locally), need to be reviewed periodically for currency and relevance. Qualifications Scotland will work in partnership with centres to carry out reviews.

9.1 Centre-devised (locally) qualifications

Centres with devolved authority to validate their own group awards are responsible for formally reviewing their own qualifications and any associated costs, in accordance with system verification criteria.

Where a new or revised group award is to be developed, you should inform Qualifications Scotland via a DO/1.

10.0 Group award withdrawal

Group awards in Qualifications Scotland's portfolio, both national or centre-devised (local), will be withdrawn where:

- an existing group award has been revised by another group award
- there has been no candidate uptake for a period of two or more consecutive years (three years for HN)
- uptake is too low to sustain a meaningful national standard

Note: There is no defined minimum uptake. Qualifications are reviewed on an individual basis, considering review history, including system verification reports.

All group award withdrawals are subject to approval by Qualifications Scotland's Business Case Group to ensure relevant processes have been followed.

11.0 Sample project plan for centre-led group award development and validation

Qualification title:

Key tasks to be completed by the centre:	Required date
Submit a Development Opportunity Form to Qualifications Scotland to inform them of development/validation intentions by:	
Group award to be coded on APS by:	
Group award validation date:	
Group award validation method agreed with Qualifications Scotland lead officer:	
QDT meetings (dates identified and members invited) by:	
Unit writer training on Qualifications Scotland Academy to be completed by:	
Equality Review Training on Qualifications Scotland Academy to be completed by:	
Units emailed to Qualifications Scotland for validation by: Note: Include technical edit and equality review documentation in submission.	
Group award specification and supporting documentation submitted to validation panel members by:	
Submission of assessment exemplification (if applicable) to Qualifications Scotland for prior verification by:	
End of project by: (DAVAL1 form, signed validation report, validated group award specification and graded units (if applicable) emailed to Qualifications Scotland.)	

Key tasks to be completed by the Qualifications Scotland lead officer:	Required date
Review Development Opportunity Form and discuss any issues with similar developments or unit proliferation and next steps with centre by:	
Invite the Qualifications Scotland qualifications manager whose portfolio the group award will sit in to participate in the validation meeting, and confirm details with the centre by:	
Establish verification requirements, ie existing group/re-allocation of existing verifiers/new group to be set up on APS — recruitment required.	
Technically edit/validate units by:	
Process units through document processing by:	
Arrange coding of units on APS by:	
Arrange coding of group award on APS by:	
Produce information needed for the qualification page on Qualifications Scotland website by:	