Higher National and Scottish Vocational Qualifications

Qualification Verification Summary Report 2022

Agriculture

Verification group number: 377

Introduction

In academic session 2021–22, four centres were visited by external verifiers for SVQs covering the following awards:

SVQ in Mixed Farming at SCQF level 6: GR6H 23
SVQ in Agriculture Livestock at SCQF level 6: GR6E 23
SVQ in Agriculture at SCQF level 5: GR6G 22
SVQ in Mixed Farming at SCQF level 6: GH5D 23
SVQ Agriculture SCQF level 5: GH5A 22

Three of the centres visited were Scottish further education colleges, and one was a training provider.

There was one verification event for Higher National awards within the verification group, for the following award:

HNC Poultry Production: G949 15

The HN event and three of the four SVQ events resulted in a high confidence rating, with one of Broad Confidence. Only one main point for action was identified, relating to internal verification, and a number of recommendations were made.

Most centres still had some changes to their traditional delivery pattern due to the pandemic, with hybrid working taking place at a number of centres. Verifiers were confident that the overall standards of the qualifications are being maintained.

Category 2: Resources

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

For SVQ provision, all assessors and verifiers held appropriate technical qualifications for the assessment and verification of the awards. In all centres staff were qualified to HND or degree level. Almost all had the appropriate assessor/verifier awards, with the exception of a centre where new verifiers were in the final stages of completing their award. The assessors and verifiers had a wide range of practical experience in the agriculture industry.

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

In all centres, staff CVs and up-to-date continuing professional development (CPD) records were available. All staff had access to CPD through their centre. CPD opportunities remained limited, but many centres continued with internal or virtual CPD events. Most of the CPD undertaken related to new ways of working, including use of new technology.

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

All centres carried out reviews of materials and resources on a regular basis, and units were subject to a pre-delivery check in accordance with the centre quality procedures. In most centres the materials are available through a virtual learning environment (VLE).

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

Category 3: Candidate support

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

Many centres recruit candidates directly for the programmes, while a few progress from other awards such as the NC Agriculture. There are a range of mechanisms in place in centres to ensure candidates are matched to the appropriate qualification and level, including formal and informal interviews to identify the expectations and needs of individual candidates.

Candidates' individual support needs are identified and met in most cases, although a number of candidates at one centre expressed a need for more training in use of the VLE. The nature of support varies according to the centre and the candidate's needs, but can include readers, scribes or the provision of classroom assistants.

In some centres, additional job-related qualifications were undertaken such as Forklift and all-terrain vehicle (ATV) training.

All candidates who were interviewed as part of verification activity were very happy with the progress of their award and the support they received from the centre, although delays in receiving feedback and issues with the VLE were highlighted.

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

The mode of delivery of the awards varied both between centres and between different campuses of the same centre, but in almost all cases assessment takes place in the workplace. Reviews of progress take place on a regular basis.

All portfolios of evidence included tracking sheets to enable candidates to monitor their progress. The number of assessors and the number of visits to workplaces varied both between centres and between campuses of the same centre.

Category 4: Internal assessment and verification

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

All centres have an internal verification policy in place and, in all cases, this was comprehensive and had been reviewed recently. In almost all centres candidates work had been internally verified effectively in accordance with this policy.

In all centres, the policy states that assessments undergo a pre-delivery check and units of the award are internally verified a minimum of once every three years. All centres have standard internal verification pro-formas that were used to record the results of internal verification.

All centres have records of standardisation meetings to ensure consistency of assessment practice. Some of these meetings have been held virtually.

Formal observation of live practical assessment was not possible at verification events this session.

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

A wide range of assessment instruments were used for assessment of the awards across centres. The most common are assessor observation checklists and underpinning knowledge questions, but many centres provide additional supporting evidence such as photographs, job cards, dairy logs, witness testimonies, and other farm-based records of work. In all centres all assessment instruments are clearly cross-referenced to the LANTRA National Occupational Standards.

All centres use a portfolio-based approach where assessment materials are gathered together, often in an electronic portfolio. Some centres were flexible in allowing the candidate to choose either paper based or electronic portfolios based on their preference although most evidence was in an electronic format with only a few continuing to use a paper-based system. In all cases the portfolios were well laid out with clear cross-referencing.

ICT, and in particular virtual learning environments and electronic portfolios, were used to record assessment evidence, including answers to underpinning knowledge questions and photographs of practical activity.

In one centre, additional farm-based evidence would have been beneficial. In another centre the bank of multiple-choice underpinning knowledge questions would have benefited from more questions being added. Clear guidance for use and acceptance of witness testimonies completed by family members (common in a farm setting) is required in one centre.

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

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

Many centres had introduced additional authenticity checks due to the increased use of electronic evidence including individual declarations for each piece of evidence and inclusion of e-mail trails submitted with evidence.

In almost all centres it was clear that work was that of the individual candidates. Practical work is still mainly covered by assessor observation checklists. The guidance for witness testimonies produced by family members requires to be clearer in one centre to ensure authenticity of evidence.

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

At all centres the underpinning knowledge questions completed by candidates were marked and signed by the assessor. In most cases, candidates were given constructive feedback on their knowledge answers, and remediation provided an appropriate level of guidance to candidates where necessary.

In one centre it was unclear what supervision was in place for online assessments being completed remotely.

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

All materials requested during visit planning were made available, either in paper or electronic format, prior to the virtual verification event. All centres have a policy on the retention of materials for the purpose of internal and external verification, and these had been implemented. All centre staff were aware of the SQA policy in relation to retention of evidence for quality assurance purposes. In reality, many centres retain portfolios with assessment evidence well beyond the SQA required date for other audit purposes.

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

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

In all Scottish further education college centres that were verified, the responsibility for dissemination of feedback, including external verification reports, lies within a quality unit. The staff in the quality unit are responsible for circulating the verification reports to relevant managers and assessors/verifiers. The reports are then discussed at a section, team or

course meeting, and actions are agreed and actioned. In other centres, the reports are circulated, usually by the SQA coordinator or Head of Centre, to relevant staff for discussion and action.

In all centres, staff interviewed were aware of the contents of previous reports (where there was one). Reference to the content of previous reports was included in either standardisation meeting minutes or in action logs where actioned were detailed and signed off when complete.

Areas of good practice reported by qualification verifiers

The following good practice was reported during session 2021–22:

♦ Live observation of assessment practice by an internal verifier.
♦ Adaptations to conditions of assessment for HN provision (introduced during the pandemic) had worked well.

Specific areas for development

The following areas for development were reported during session 2021–22:

♦ Variation in practice between campuses of the same centre, including the number of workplace visits, induction, communication and support for candidates.
♦ The process and guidelines for completion of witness testimonies from family members was not consistent.
♦ Knowledge and understanding questions need to be reviewed and added to.
♦ Assessor and internal verifier lists need to be kept up to date.
♦ Lack of training for candidates in the use of the VLE.
♦ Supervision of remote online completed assessments needs to be clarified.