SQA

Higher National Qualifications, National Progression Awards and Scottish Vocational Qualifications

Qualification Verification Summary Report 2022

Financial Services

Verification group number: 262

Introduction

This report covers the 10 verification events completed in centres in Scotland during 2021–22 and covers Scottish Vocational Qualifications (including the use of Vocational Qualifications Units in the Foundation Apprenticeship) and the Fast Track Customised Award. In line with SQA policy, all the verification visits were completed as virtual events via Microsoft Teams. No other adjustments were made to the verification process or criteria reviewed.

Like last year, much of this academic year involved assessors having to make adjustments to account for the fact that candidates were working from home. During the year, candidates began to return to the workplace so latterly, with hybrid working, assessors were able to meet candidates in person and revert to the previous methods of assessment.

The following awards were verified in 2021–22 and are covered in this report:

SVQ Providing Financial Services SVQ at SCQF level 5   GP2Y 22
SVQ Providing Financial Services at SCQF level 6   GP30 23
Financial and Professional Services Fast Track Award   GR10 04
Foundation Apprenticeship Financial Services (VQ units)   GR3Y 46

Despite the difficulties faced almost all the external verification events resulted in outcomes of 'high confidence'. Many of the assessors and internal verifiers in this verification group have been involved with delivering the awards for several years and therefore have a very sound understanding of the standards required.

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.

The standard of evidencing the competence of assessors and internal verifiers is now of a good standard in most centres. However, there is still room for improvement in other centres to improve the recording of CPD. In particular, as mentioned previously, all assessors and internal verifiers must keep up to date with the processes and systems in the financial services organisations their candidates are based. This professional development should be documented in CPD records. Secondly, too many records are still lists of activities without an indication of how the learning will be applied in their teaching, candidate support, assessment and verification activities. These updates should also link to other verification activities, for example the application of the learning in the reviews and updates of assessment and learning materials (criterion 2.4) and internal verification and assessment decisions (4.2 and 4.6 in particular).

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

There has been a lot of pressure on resources in centres and whilst for many, the evidence presented for this criterion was valid, it was noted there was much less diligence in reviewing learning materials than in the past. Several centres deliver a lot of their learning and a proportion of their assessment using workbooks but there was not always evidence that these workbooks had been reviewed this year. Conversations with staff indicated informal reviews had been undertaken and it was noted there was very little out of date content in the workbooks. However, change is a constant in the financial services industry and centres should have processes in place for completing and documenting more formal reviews of these workbooks at least annually. Documentation can be by a summary checklist or there could be reference to reviews in the pre-delivery internal verification documentation.

Category 3: Candidate support

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

All the candidates completing the Vocational Qualifications and Fast Track Awards continue to be recruited against criterion prescribed by the schemes/funders involved. Teaching staff, assessors and internal verifiers are usually not involved in this recruitment process. All the centres hold appropriate additional discussions during the induction process to review any other development needs or prior achievements that might be relevant to the award.

As well as these conversations, in one centre short videos have been posted online each one covering a topic the candidate might require reference to in the future, such as support opportunities and additional language courses. This is good practice because it means just-in-time guidance is available to candidates at all times — too often some candidates forget what is told to them at induction and as a result their development needs are not met quickly when they arise.

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

In all centres, candidates were supported by their assessors, by telephone/email/skype and on Microsoft Teams. There was regular contact and there was evidence of very good assessment planning in most centres which took account of the ongoing challenges of remote and hybrid working. In the Fast Track Award, one centre had developed a good formative assessment which enabled the candidates to practise completing timed assessments online as many were not familiar with a virtual assessment environment. This was an example of good practice which gave the candidates the opportunity to realistically review their progress.

Category 4: Internal assessment and verification

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

In most centres internal assessment and verification procedures were implemented to a better standard than previously. There were, however, some centres where there was still little evidence of a sampling plan being developed with regular internal verification being completed. There is still evidence that too much of the internal verification activity seems to be triggered by the date of the external verification visit and happens in the days prior to the visit.

Finding internal verifiers with financial services experience has been a challenge for several centres. One centre has resolved their difficulties by creating an innovative hybrid verification model. Internal verification is completed by two people, the initial reviews are completed by an experienced financial services professional currently working in the industry who is on contract to the centre. The professional gives feedback on the technical validity of the assessment decisions to a qualified internal verifier who has only limited experience of the sector. Reports are jointly prepared documents. This is a good way to resolve the recruitment difficulties.

It was good to see that in many centres there was excellent team working between the assessors and internal verifiers. Internal verifiers were coaching less experienced assessors and helping develop their assessment skills through the constructive feedback given. There was also good evidence in some centres that the internal verifier was quality assuring not only the assessment decisions made, but also the quality of the feedback given to the candidates. This is something all centres should be paying attention to.

The one area that most centres might look to improve is the completion and documentation of standardisation activities. In many centres, standardisation takes place during existing team meetings and other events can reduce the time available for standardisation. Those centres evidencing good practice hold standardisation meetings separate from regular team meetings and prepare more detailed decision logs and records following the meeting.

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

Appropriate assessment instruments and methods are being used in almost all the centres, although issues arose in a few because there was no evidence of a sufficient range of methods being used to confirm candidate performance. This was due to these centres over-relying on workbooks as performance evidence. Many workbooks were focused on sharing and assessing knowledge which does not give sufficient evidence for most criteria in the awards. Centres that do use workbooks successfully use the completed workbooks as evidence primarily for underpinning knowledge assessment and select other methods (typically observations or workplace activities) to confirm competence.

One centre still restricted to remote learning developed a good process to support the delivery of timed assessments. The closed-book assessment required to be completed

under invigilated conditions, so whilst online monitoring of candidates was possible, for some questions assessment calculations had to be completed. They had found candidates were not confident in typing up the workings to calculation questions online and this was becoming a barrier to assessment. However, assessors needed to see candidate workings in addition to the answers to confirm the evidence met the requirements of the unit specification. The centre developed a process where candidates completed their answers as they would in an examination. They then took a photo of their answers on their phones and transferred this to the centre at the conclusion of the timed assessment, whilst they were still being invigilated remotely.

Most centres have now overcome the difficulties previously reported regarding employer restrictions relating to completing observation of the candidate in the workplace.
Good use continued to be made of a variety of other checks to confirm performance (questioning, line manager confirmation of workplace performance, professional discussions, candidate reflective statements explaining what actions they took on the organisation's systems during the transaction etc).

There were, however, instances in some centres where the assessor was taking on too much responsibility for mapping the candidate evidence to the performance criteria. There will always be instances where the assessor does contribute to the mapping activity, but it is not good practice for the assessor to do all the mapping. The candidate must take some ownership for determining where their learning and work activities reflect the standards of the award, particularly for the level 6 awards.

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

Centres continue yet again to take appropriate steps to validate the authenticity of evidence to ensure that what is being submitted has been generated by the candidate. Written submissions are reviewed in many centres using Turnitin or other appropriate software. This gives an additional layer of validation that work is the candidate's own work. It is suggested if centres use software reviews they include sample printouts in their evidence to the external verifier to further confirm the work the centre is doing in relation to this criterion.

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

Generally, the assessment of candidate evidence across all the awards was accurate and consistent and appropriate decisions were made. However, there was again a tendency in a few centres for some performance to be inferred from some evidence without sufficient justification. This led to action plans being required. This was an issue that has been discussed in previous reports and is something that all centres need to keep a watch on.

In the Fast Track Award, centres were not always using assessment checklists to document where assessment criteria had, or had not, been met in each assessment. In addition, where assessment was completed on an outcome-by-outcome basis, there were no summary sheets capturing the candidate's achievement in each unit. This represents a risk that a candidate may not achieve one outcome, but this is overlooked in the master results list and

an incorrect result is submitted. Having a summary results list that collates the results for all assessments reduces this risk.

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

All centres are retaining their candidate evidence for a period that exceeds the SQA requirements. Good use continues to be made of e-portfolios and archiving systems to support evidence retention that complies with data protection regulations.

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

There was less attention played to the dissemination and review of feedback from qualification verifiers than in the past. This may be due to the time pressures in centres as they also worked to move back from remote delivery of learning and team meetings to more face-to-face work in a short space of time.

In the next year, centres should try and ensure they devote sufficient time to fully discuss their qualification verification visit report and identify where they can enhance the quality of their assessment and verification practices. This year, where centres were showing they had discussed the report in terms of what the findings were, there was much less evidence of taking this discussion to the final level and using it to inform their assessment practice. Next year, centres should aim to do this as it makes a significant contribution to continuous improvement of quality assurance in the centre.

Centres are also encouraged to include a review of this report within their team meetings.

Areas of good practice reported by qualification verifiers

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

♦ Continued flexibility by assessors to adapt to the types of working pattern of each candidate
♦ The use of industry professionals to support qualified internal verifiers in their work
♦ The use of a video reference library accessible to candidates whenever they needed it, that outlined help available to candidates who were needing more support with their studies
♦ Use of photographs to support the uploading of evidence for completing calculation questions online where there were closed-book assessment conditions
♦ Making good use of three-way meetings between assessor, candidate and line manager to support assessment planning and evidence authentication

Specific areas for development

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

♦ The completion and documentation of CPD activities, ensuring subject-specific knowledge is kept up to date and that the records include reflection on how the learning will be applied
♦ Document reviews of learning and assessment materials
♦ Develop more comprehensive and robust internal verification plans ensuring internal verification takes place throughout the year rather than just prior to the external verification visit
♦ Ensure that there is a review of the quality of feedback given to candidates within the activities of the internal verifier
♦ Ensure there is sufficient time in team meetings for standardisation activities and that there are clear records of the activity and the decisions (if any) taken
♦ Ensure evidence generated by completion of workbooks is not used to infer performance in the workplace
♦ Use summary assessment checklists to record overall results
♦ Ensure sufficient time is allocated to reviewing and reflecting on qualification verification feedback