Higher National Qualifications, Scottish Vocational Qualifications and National Units

Qualification Verification Summary Report 2022

Horticulture

Verification group number: 146

Introduction

In academic session 2021–22, 12 centres were visited by external verifiers for SVQs, covering the following awards:

SVQ Parks, Gardens and Green Space at SCQF level 6: GH7E 23
SVQ Landscaping at SCQF level 6: GH7C 23
SVQ Horticulture at SCQF level 5: GH79 22
SVQ Horticulture at SCQF level 4: G9HV 21
SVQ in Landscaping at SCQF level 5: GH7A 22
SVQ in Horticulture at SCQF level 5: GR6K 22
SVQ in Landscaping at SCQF level 5: GR6L 22
SVQ in Parks, Gardens and Green Space at SCQF level 6: GR6N 23
SVQ in Parks, Gardens and Green Space at SCQF level 5: GR6R 22
SVQ in Landscaping at SCQF level 6: GR6M 23

Six of the centres visited were Scottish further education colleges, three were local authorities, and three were training providers.

One centre had a visit deferred until next session due to a lack of available candidate evidence.

All recommendations resulting from previous session visits had been addressed.

There was one verification event for Higher National awards, and one event for National Awards for:

HND Horticulture: GJ9P 16
NPA Horticulture: GL2C 44

All visits resulted in a high confidence rating. No main points for action were identified at any visit, although there were some recommendations resulting from the visits.

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.

Almost all recommendations from previous visits had been addressed. While some centres were still on a hybrid working approach, verifiers were confident that the overall standards of the qualifications are being maintained.

While verification for most centres was virtual, visits were carried out in a few centres.

There has been a significant increase in centres using electronic evidence as part of the candidate portfolios.

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 SVQs, all assessors and verifiers held appropriate technical qualifications for assessment and verification. In most centres, staff were qualified to HND or degree level in horticulture. Almost all had the appropriate assessor/verifier awards with the exception of one new member of staff who was working towards them. The assessors and verifiers had a wide range of practical experience including from local authorities, the National Trust, landscape companies, golf courses, nurseries and garden centres.

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.

For NPA provision (SCQF Level 4) staff did not have formal horticulture qualifications but had science degrees and a range of relevant practical experience.

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.

Some centres undertook CPD relating to the development of materials for the revised awards, while others had examples of CPD of specific relevance to their candidate groups, for example Tree Inspection training.

In the one centre who had new staff there were good induction and support mechanisms, including shadowing experienced staff.

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. The materials from one centre would have benefited from the use of more appropriate terminology in relation to vocational qualification delivery. One centre would have benefited from the use of the same materials at all delivery sites.

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 practical work on suitable sites and were well resourced for delivery and assessment of the awards. The awards are delivered at a wide range of suitable sites including public parks, community and heritage sites and private landscaped areas (housing associations and private gardens).

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 centres are sent candidates by employers to attend on a day-release basis. There are a range of mechanisms in place in centres to ensure candidates are matched to the appropriate qualification and level. Some centres offer taster days where candidates can find out more about the programmes, other have formal interviews to identify the expectations and needs of individual candidates.

In some centres, candidates are automatically given Core Skills testing as part of the entry process, while others carry it out at the start of the programme. Where candidates are sent from employers, a few of the centres are involved in the recruitment process in partnership with the employer. All centres identify candidates' support needs during the recruitment process, and all have mechanisms in place to provide additional support to candidates if required. This can include referral to a third party or to other sections within the organisation. The nature of support varies according to the centre and the candidate needs but can include readers, scribes or the provision of classroom assistants.

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. This support included the allocation of mentors in addition to feedback on assessments leading to an increase in motivation of candidates.

Where candidates were from employers, the staff there also had a role in candidate support including the provision of an allocated mentor or workplace supervisor.

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

At all centres, contact with assessors had varied during the session as the restrictions on meeting in groups changed. By the end of the session, many were back to attending the centre for completion of the award, with some still using a hybrid mode of delivery. Progress reviews take place on a regular basis, and with employed candidates these have taken place at a virtual meeting between the assessor, candidate and their manager to discuss progress, consider resource needs and plan work.

All portfolios included tracking sheets to enable candidates to monitor their progress.

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 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 have been held virtually. In some centres standardisation meetings take place on a regular basis, while in others standardisation forms part of a wider meeting agenda. In smaller centres this can be informal and recorded in a log rather than with formal minutes.
Centres used a range of methods for recording standardisation discussions, including a 'change to assessment' folder, a 'record of discussion' log or formal action minutes to record any relevant changes.

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 are 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, identification tests, logbooks, personal statements, witness testimonies, propagation logs and records of work. In almost 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. Most centres provided assessment evidence in electronic format with only a few continuing to use a paper-based system. In almost all cases the portfolios were well laid out with clear cross-referencing. Previous recommendations that had not been addressed included avoiding the use of incorrect terminology such as 'outcome' or 'element' from materials.

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.

A few centres had a generic evidence section in the portfolio where items common to a number of units were kept, for example tool identification, plant profiles and pest/disease recognition.

In a few centres, completed assessment materials would have benefited from more feedback on assessor observation checklists and photographic evidence being cross referenced to the occupational standards.

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, which 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 email trails submitted with evidence.

In all centres it was clear that work was that of the individual candidates. Practical work is still mainly covered by assessor observation checklists.

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. The answers given by candidates were, in almost all cases, good or very good and appropriate for the level of study.

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 co-ordinator or head of centre, to relevant staff for discussion and action.

In all centres, staff interviewed were aware of the contents of previous reports. Reference to the content of previous reports was included in either standardisation meeting minutes or in action logs where actioned, and 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:

♦ The use of diagrams and pictures as part of underpinning knowledge questions.
♦ Contextualised knowledge and understanding questions for the specific sector, for example local authorities.
♦ Schools linking with each other to standardise assessment practice.

Specific areas for development

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

♦ Expansion of the SQA exemplar assessments for the NPA Horticulture into workbooks for candidates.
♦ Photographic evidence to be cross-referenced to the occupational standards.
♦ More feedback on assessor observation checklists.
♦ Removal of incorrect terminology from assessment materials.