

HIGHER NATIONAL



QUALITY ASSURANCE GUIDANCE FOR CENTRES

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Next Generation: Higher National Quality Assurance

Guidance for centres

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Introduction

This guidance document focuses on the quality assurance process for Next Generation Higher National (NextGen: HN) Qualifications, and highlights the key differences between our mainstream approach to quality assurance and the NextGen: HN quality assurance model. You should use this guidance with the [Qualification Verification: Guidance for Centres](#) document available on SQA's website.

NextGen: HN aims to deliver dynamic and flexible qualifications that develop skills, self-awareness, creativity and resilience. Meeting industry and societal needs, they empower and enable learners to thrive in a fast-changing and complex world.

NextGen: HN key features

Qualifications and assessment

NextGen: HN Qualifications involve fewer and larger units, which encourages more integrated learning, teaching and assessment approaches, and results in a lower assessment load for learners. They do not contain graded units.

Learning

Meta-skills embedded into units can help learners develop and excel in skills that will be useful in further education, employment and beyond. Meta-skills include self-management, social intelligence and innovation.

Digital technology

Using digital technology to support and underpin teaching, learning and assessment approaches gives learners more input on and confidence in the qualifications.

Grading

NextGen: HN Qualifications use 'whole qualification' grading. This means that, to achieve a grade in a NextGen: HN Qualification, a learner must demonstrate achievement across the breadth of the qualification content.

Learning for sustainability

Various evidence suggests that learners want college curriculums to give greater consideration to the environment and climate change. NextGen: HN Qualifications incorporate learning for sustainability where possible, so that learners develop:

- ◆ an understanding of sustainability in general
- ◆ a good grounding in subject-specific sustainability knowledge and skills
- ◆ the confidence to apply this knowledge and skills in the next stage of their lives

NextGen: HN quality assurance model

Effective quality assurance maintains the integrity of our qualifications by ensuring assessment decisions are valid, reliable, practicable, equitable and fair. For NextGen: HN Qualifications, we have introduced a supportive, ongoing and progressive process of external quality assurance, while continuing to confirm that standards are being met and maintained in assessment practice.

The SQA staff responsible for quality assuring NextGen: HN Qualifications are external quality assurers (EQAs). SQA appoints these experienced subject experts to carry out quality assurance activities.

A key difference in our approach is the allocation of EQAs at the beginning of the session, with a named EQA for each NextGen: HN Qualification you deliver. There may be more than one EQA involved, depending on the make-up of the qualification being verified. EQAs engage with course teams at the beginning of each session and regularly throughout the year to provide support with assessment design, delivery and decision-making.

NextGen: HN courses include the development of meta-skills as part of their core content. The meta-skills framework is made up of various generic skills, covering the development of self-management, social intelligence and innovation, so that learners can adapt and perform well regardless of context. Your EQA can provide support and guidance on how to embed meta-skills within your course delivery and how to evidence them through learner coursework.

NextGen: HN Qualifications take a new approach to grading, to better reflect a learner's standard in their Higher National Certificate (HNC) or Higher National Diploma (HND). We want to ensure centres are applying the grading model fairly and consistently, and this is a key feature of our quality assurance process.

NextGen: HN Qualifications are quality assured at group award level, and we continue to measure them against our existing quality assurance criteria. You can find an overview of the full qualification verification criteria in the [Qualification Verification Criteria: Guidance for centres](#) document on SQA's website.

Process overview

EQAs are responsible for quality assurance activities. We assign one lead EQA for each qualification who is the main point of contact for your centre about quality assurance requirements. Additional EQAs may be required for group awards with more than one subject specialism. We give you information about their names and subject specialism at the beginning of the session.

Lead EQAs co-ordinate with any additional EQAs to provide support and guidance throughout the delivery and assessment of the qualification.

Please refer to Appendix 1 for further information on quality assurance criteria breakdown by role.

Initial contact

Your Lead EQA will contact you to arrange an initial virtual pre-delivery meeting, to cover the following recommended agenda points:

- ◆ Introductions:
 - EQA(s) and members of the centre's delivery and quality teams
- ◆ Changes from last session:
 - Any updates to the qualification (if applicable)
 - Any changes to the delivery of the qualification (if applicable)
- ◆ Touchpoints:
 - Proposed structure of future touchpoints
 - Agree provisional date for first touchpoint
- ◆ Any known support requirements at this time i.e. writing instruments of assessment

Touchpoints

Your EQA gets in touch to arrange your first touchpoint meeting after the pre-delivery meeting. We have introduced touchpoints for the NextGen: HN quality assurance model to help EQAs determine your centre's support requirements and development needs from early on in the session. While there is no fixed number of touchpoints, we do not anticipate centres needing more than three throughout the session for each qualification they deliver.

As well as giving support, touchpoints allow EQAs to review and measure some of the quality assurance criteria throughout the session. This allows for a more flexible approach to quality assurance, and can give centres the opportunity to fix issues or concerns before they become recordable non-compliances.

We suggest using the following structure when you agree an agenda with EQAs:

Touchpoint 1 (suggested):

- ◆ review meeting agenda
- ◆ unit specifications
 - understanding
 - questions
- ◆ delivery plan
 - identify required timelines to ensure assessments are ready
- ◆ assessments
 - review, development and support
- ◆ grading and meta-skills
 - any support or guidance required?

- ◆ next touchpoint meeting
 - date
 - expected discussion

Touchpoint 2 (suggested):

- ◆ review meeting agenda
- ◆ delivery plan
 - review if it is on track
 - date for assessment materials to be ready and fit for purpose
- ◆ assessments
 - review, development and support
- ◆ grading and meta-skills
 - review if they are on track
 - any additional support or guidance required?
- ◆ issues or concerns
- ◆ next touchpoint meeting
 - date
 - expected discussion

Touchpoint 3 (suggested):

- ◆ review meeting agenda
- ◆ delivery plan
 - review if it is on track
 - date for assessment materials to be ready and fit for purpose
- ◆ assessments
 - review, development and support
- ◆ grading and meta-skills
 - review if they are on track
 - any additional support or guidance required?
- ◆ issues or concerns
- ◆ next touchpoint meeting, if required
 - date
 - expected discussion

External verification activity

Through external verification, SQA ensures that centres assess their candidates in line with national standards, and that assessment decisions comply with SQA's quality assurance criteria.

EQAs review assessment decisions during a formal external verification activity. The [Qualification Verification Criteria: Guidance for centres](#) document details information on sampling, referencing of evidence, internal verification, discussions with centre staff and candidates, and the output of external verification activity. All verification requirements detailed within the document apply to NextGen: HN external verification activity.

Notable differences in the external verification of NextGen: HN Qualifications, compared with original HN Qualifications, include the following:

- ◆ Timelines for external verification activity are agreed between your centre and EQAs during touchpoint meetings.
- ◆ EQAs review how candidates have evidenced their meta-skills progression throughout the qualification delivery.
- ◆ EQAs review and confirm your centre's application of the grading model to ensure fairness and consistency, and correct judgements on a candidate's overall grading based on the evidence they produce.

Quality assurance report

We have designed a dynamic and fluid report to underpin the NextGen: HN quality assurance model and capture all quality assurance activities. The report is created before your pre-delivery meeting, and you receive an updated version within 15 working days after each collaboration with your EQAs. This allows for a complete record of the quality assurance activities for each qualification throughout the session.

Depending on the outcome of the external verification activity, sanctions may be imposed on your centre. These could range from required actions that you must address with an action plan, through to suspension or removal of qualification approval. You must submit evidence of how you have addressed each required action on or before the agreed date.

You can find more information on quality assurance outcome ratings and sanctions in the [Qualification Verification Criteria: Guidance for centres](#) document.

After external verification activity

If you need more support after your external verification activity, you can request an additional touchpoint meeting. You can use this touchpoint to get support on your verification outcome, review assessment materials before submission for prior verification, or for guidance on preparing for delivery in the next session. Please contact the NextGen: HN Quality Assurance Team (operationshmvq@sqa.org.uk) to request this.

Appendix 1

Quality assurance criteria by role

| Quality assurance criteria | Lead EQA | Additional EQA(s) |
|--|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 2.1 Assessors and internal verifiers must be competent to assess and internally verify, in line with the requirements of the qualification. | Yes – for their allocated unit(s)* | Yes – for their allocated unit(s)* |
| 2.4 There must be evidence of initial and ongoing reviews of assessment environments; equipment; and reference, learning and assessment materials. | Yes – for all units selected | No |
| 3.2 Candidates' development needs and prior achievements (where appropriate) must be matched against the requirements of the award. | Yes – for all units selected | No |
| 3.3 Candidates must have scheduled contact with their assessor to review their progress and revise their assessment plans accordingly. | Yes – for their allocated unit(s) | Yes – for their allocated unit(s) |
| 4.2 Internal assessment and verification procedures must be implemented to ensure standardisation of assessment. | Yes – for their allocated unit(s) | Yes – for their allocated unit(s) |
| 4.3 Assessment instruments and methods and their selection and use must be valid, reliable, practicable, equitable and fair. | Yes – for their allocated unit(s) | Yes – for their allocated unit(s) |
| 4.4 Assessment evidence must be the candidate's own work, generated under SQA's required conditions. | Yes – for their allocated unit(s) | Yes – for their allocated unit(s) |
| 4.6 Evidence of candidates' work must be accurately and consistently judged by assessors against SQA requirements. | Yes – for their allocated unit(s) | Yes – for their allocated unit(s) |
| 4.7 Candidate evidence must be retained in line with SQA requirements. | Yes – for all units selected | No |
| 4.9 Feedback from qualification verifiers must be disseminated to staff and used to inform assessment practice. | Yes – for all units selected | No |

*where the qualification requirements stipulate