

Quality Assurance of Assessment Arrangements in Internal and External Assessments: Information for centres

Version 2.0

Publication date: May 2025 (First published: November 2008)

Publication code: FA7266

Published by the Scottish Qualifications Authority

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www.sqa.org.uk

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This guidance document has undergone a full revision, in line with the latest changes made to the Quality Assurance of Assessment Arrangement process. To stay informed and aware of these changes we strongly recommend that you carefully study this latest edition.

Summary of changes since version 1

- ◆ New clearer structure.
- ◆ New section 'Inform all staff of their roles and responsibilities in relation to quality assurance of assessment arrangements'.
- ◆ Revised information on Quality Assurance of Assessment Arrangement Visits.
- ◆ Revised Quality Assurance criteria and examples of acceptable evidence for Quality Assurance of Assessment Arrangement visits.
- ◆ Separate sections created for Quality Assurance Process and Quality Assurance Visits from SQA for externally assessed National Courses.
- ◆ Changed process for colleges, employers and training providers (please refer to the Systems Verification guidance).

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Introduction

We have a responsibility to ensure that the assessment process is robust and fair for all learners. This is why we must ensure that assessment arrangements are appropriate and only provided to those learners who have an identified difficulty. This could be a physical difficulty (including medical or sensory difficulty), a behavioural or mental health difficulty, or a learning difficulty.

This guidance will help you ensure that you have an effective internal quality assurance process in place for the provision of assessment arrangements for disabled learners or learners with additional support needs. The guidance will also help you to prepare for quality assurance or external verification visits in the event that your centre is selected for this activity.

You should read this document along with [Assessment Arrangements Explained: Information for Centres](#), which details the key principles when making a decision about assessment arrangements.

You must have an effective internal quality assurance process for identifying and establishing learners' needs for assessment arrangements in all internal and external assessments (including coursework) for the SQA qualifications that you deliver, including National Courses. You must read and understand the assessment arrangements guidance on our website and ensure that your own centre's policies and processes align with this guidance.

In [SQA's Systems Verification Criteria](#), Quality Assurance Criterion 3.5 requires that colleges and training providers have policies and procedures in place for managing assessment arrangements for both internal and external assessments. You must also have evidence of how you implement your assessment arrangement policies and procedures.

Your centre's responsibilities

Your centre's quality assurance process should include stages to:

1. Inform all staff of their roles and responsibilities in relation to quality assurance of assessment arrangements.
2. Identify, as early as possible, any difficulty a disabled learner might have in demonstrating their attainment through the published assessment procedures.
3. Determine the most appropriate assessment arrangement for the learner
4. Establish the learner's need for the assessment arrangement in an internal or external assessment.
5. Authorise assessment arrangements.

All these stages must be documented, implemented and monitored to meet SQA's requirements. There's an explanation of each stage in the next section

At all stages, it is essential that there is professional dialogue between teaching and lecturing staff, learning support (we use this term to refer to any support staff in all centres, including equality and inclusion staff, throughout this document), those responsible for quality assurance, and those submitting assessment arrangement requests to us.

In some cases, evidence from other professionals, such as therapists, specialist teachers, disability practitioners or educational psychologists, may be used as part of your wider evidence base. This type of evidence is not an exhaustive list. It can be varied and could help you to decide whether or not an assessment arrangement is appropriate for an individual learner, and on the nature and extent of that arrangement.

In all cases, SQA co-ordinators and senior management staff should work closely with learning support, and teaching and lecturing, staff to ensure they are aware of the assessment arrangements that learners need.

Partnership agreements

Where there is a partnership or consortium agreement in the teaching of a National Course, there must be consideration of how to share AA evidence and information for learners taking courses with the presenting centre.

The assessment arrangements process in centres

1: Inform all staff of their roles and responsibilities in relation assessment arrangements

All staff should be aware of their roles and responsibilities in the quality assurance of assessment arrangements, and the deadlines they need to meet. Teaching staff are responsible for providing learning support staff with:

- ◆ Information about the qualifications or courses they are teaching
- ◆ The skills, knowledge and competences being assessed
- ◆ Any concerns that a proposed assessment arrangement might compromise the integrity of the assessment

They are also responsible for keeping learning support staff informed throughout the academic year about whether the assessment arrangement provided to a learner in their course is appropriate.

Centres often include a timeline and all other documentation used in their assessment arrangements process within their policy. This ensures that all the relevant information can be accessed in one document.

2: Identify, as early as possible, any difficulty a disabled learner might have in demonstrating their attainment through the published assessment procedures

Wherever possible, a learner's likely difficulties in accessing an assessment should be identified before they start a qualification. In some cases, the learner's difficulties may only become apparent, or could be identified by the learner themselves, by learning support staff, or by teaching staff during their course of study.

Further information from the learner's parents or carers may also be relevant and may be used as part of your centre's wider evidence base.

3: Determine the most appropriate assessment arrangement for the learner

Assessment arrangements must allow the learner to demonstrate their attainment without compromising the integrity of the assessment. This could be straightforward (for example, providing a braille question paper in the external exam) or it could require more detailed discussion with us (for example, where the assessment in a National Qualification or Higher National unit could potentially be compromised by the proposed assessment arrangement).

When assistive technology such as word processors, screen readers, or speech-to-text software are being considered, centres should ensure that:

- ◆ the learner is a confident and competent user of the technology in question; and

- ◆ any relevant formats such as digital answer books (DABs) or digital question papers have been trialled in advance to ensure familiarity and suitability.

These checks are important to avoid introducing additional stress or disadvantage during assessments and to ensure the arrangement reflects the learner's usual way of working in learning and teaching.

4: Establish the learner's need for the assessment arrangement in an internal or external assessment

You must ensure that there is evidence that clearly demonstrates the learner's need for the assessment arrangement, that you have considered whether it compromises the standards of the assessment, and that this evidence has been verified. This is important for two reasons:

- ◆ You need to be assured that your decision to provide, or not to provide, a particular assessment arrangement can be justified, and that it is in accordance with both our guidance and relevant equality legislation.
- ◆ We need to be satisfied that all centres have in place their own robust internal verification of assessment arrangements process. This ensures that all relevant information and evidence has been gathered and fully considered for every learner who has an assessment arrangement. There is more detail on evidence requirements in the section 'Quality assurance process'.

5: Authorise assessment arrangements

A member of senior management in school or an appropriate person in college is responsible for authorising the provision of an assessment arrangement in an internal assessment. Senior management staff play an important role in the internal verification process. Their role is to take a holistic approach when considering a learner's circumstances and teachers' professional judgement, to reaching a centre-based decision in line with SQA requirements. They are also responsible for authorising any assessment arrangement requests submitted to SQA for National 5 to Advanced Higher coursework and exams by the published deadline dates.

When you provide any assessment arrangement, you are confirming that:

- ◆ you have followed our quality assurance requirements
- ◆ you have met your responsibilities in terms of quality assuring the learner's need for the arrangement
- ◆ the assessment arrangement is appropriate
- ◆ you have discussed the assessment arrangement with the learner

Quality assurance of assessment arrangements visits to schools

Note: Review of the Quality Assurance of Assessment Arrangements (QA of AA) in colleges, employers and training providers is covered under existing arrangements for system verification visit (criterion 3.5), without the need for separate QA of AA visits for NQ provision only.

This section contains information on:

- ◆ the process for arranging and carrying out quality assurance of assessment arrangements visits in schools
- ◆ the format of the quality assurance of assessment arrangements visit
- ◆ the quality assurance criteria that are considered by SQA during quality assurance of assessment arrangements visits
- ◆ the evidence you should hold to demonstrate that you have met each of these quality assurance criteria

Arranging the quality assurance of assessment arrangements visit

As part of our quality assurance measures, centres delivering externally-assessed National 5 to Advanced Higher Courses may be selected for a quality assurance of assessment arrangements visit. These visits are designed to support centres and ensure they have an effective process that meets SQA requirements for the provision and management of assessment arrangements. Selection is based on several factors to ensure we have proportionate representation across all centres. These factors can include:

- ◆ the length of time since the last quality assurance visit
- ◆ size and type of the centre
- ◆ the proportion of late requests submitted by the centre
- ◆ compliance with deadline dates

If your centre is selected for a visit, we will contact your SQA co-ordinator to agree a mutually convenient date for the visit. We will maintain contact with your SQA co-ordinator throughout the process to discuss the requirements for the visit — this will include making arrangements for discussions with relevant staff and the timings of meetings during the visit.

Our external verifier will also provide details of the sample of learner evidence required for the visit. The sample will be based on requests submitted in the session prior to the quality assurance visit. Evidence should be provided for a total of 12 learners: six of these will be selected by the external verifier; the remaining six will be selected by your centre. The selected sample of 12 learners should exemplify your centre's processes and how decisions were made on the most appropriate assessment arrangements for each learner.

The format of the visit

During the visit, your centre's process for the provision and management of assessment arrangements, together with supporting evidence for each quality assurance criteria, will be reviewed.

The visit will start with a discussion with the SQA co-ordinator and members of staff who are closely involved in the centre's assessment arrangements process. Following this initial discussion, the verifier will take time to review documented evidence supplied by your centre, including learner evidence in the sample.

We will provide verbal feedback at the end of the visit to the SQA co-ordinator and any other staff that are present. The feedback will cover:

- ◆ the findings for each quality assurance criterion
- ◆ any recommendations or required actions
- ◆ comments on the supporting evidence

The feedback given during the meeting will be reflected in a detailed written QA of AA visit report that we will send to the centre after the visit. The written report will focus on the review of documented evidence and the professional dialogue that took place during the visit. The feedback included in the report will reflect what has been verbally discussed with you on the day of the visit.

Where recommendations are made, these are designed to support your centre in strengthening your existing processes. Recommendations are suggested actions, but they are not mandatory, and you do not need to act on them.

Required actions are given when it is determined that there is insufficient or no evidence to demonstrate that a quality criterion has been met. These actions must be taken forward and should be clear and specific, with an agreed date for completion. A re-visit or, where appropriate, an online meeting, will take place on a date agreed with the SQA verifier to review whether you now meet the criteria for which you had a required action. Feedback will be given at the meeting and a QA of AA Re-visit report will be sent to you.

In the unlikely event that your processes and evidence do not meet our requirements on the QA of AA re-visit, we will contact you to discuss the issue further.

We will send your SQA co-ordinator a link to a feedback questionnaire along with a copy of the visit report. Please take the time to complete this feedback and return it to us. It provides valuable information to help us make future improvements in our quality assurance processes.

Summary: the process for carrying out quality assurance of assessment arrangements visits in schools

- ◆ SQA selects centres for quality assurance of assessment arrangement visits.
- ◆ SQA external verifiers contact centres with notification of the visit, and a mutually convenient date is arranged for the visit.
- ◆ The SQA external verifier visits the centre for a review and discussion of the evidence against the quality assurance criteria. Verbal feedback is given at the end of the visit.
- ◆ Within 10 working days of the visit, the centre receives the written QA of AA Visit report noting the findings of the quality assurance visit.
- ◆ If there are any required actions, these will be clearly stated in the QA of AA Visit report and must be completed by the centre by the given date. A second quality assurance visit may be required — this will depend on the nature of any required actions.

- ◆ If the required actions have been met, the centre will receive a final QA of AA Re-visit report noting that actions have been met.
- ◆ If any required actions have not been met by the deadline, SQA will contact the centre to discuss further actions to be taken.

Quality assurance criteria and evidence requirements

Various criteria are checked when a centre has been selected for quality assurance of assessment arrangements visit. The criteria are listed below, along with information on evidence requirements and types of evidence that you might use to demonstrate how your centre meets each of these criteria. The examples provided are for information only — other types of evidence can demonstrate how your centre has met each of the criteria.

Documented evidence may be held electronically or as printed copies. In the case of digital evidence, your centre must ensure that there are appropriate security arrangements in place, such as secure access, confidential storage and data protection.

The criteria

Criterion 1 – You must provide a documented process for the management of assessment arrangements for SQA qualifications which includes:

- a. Identification of need.
- b. How you determined the most appropriate assessment arrangement.
- c. How you verified your decisions.
- d. How you communicated any agreed arrangements with the learner (and the learner's parent or carer, where appropriate).
- e. How you have considered sharing AA evidence/information for learners taking courses through partnership or consortium agreements.

Evidence requirements

- ◆ You must have documented evidence of a whole centre approach to the management of assessment arrangements.
- ◆ Evidence could take the form of a policy and procedure document, or a collection of related process documents which demonstrate that your centre has a clear timeline, and that staff are made aware of their roles and responsibilities in relation to the provision and management of assessment arrangements. Documented evidence should also demonstrate your process for sharing assessment arrangement decisions with learners and/or parents/carers, as well as the procedures in place for considering how AA evidence and information may be shared in instances of partnership delivery

Examples of evidence

- ◆ Policy or process documents for the management of an AA system. This could be part of a wider equality and inclusion document.
- ◆ Timeline or QA calendar with roles and responsibilities.

Criterion 2 – Provide or explain the evidence you have to demonstrate the learner's difficulty

Evidence requirements

- ◆ You must have evidence that the learner has been identified as having a difficulty. This written evidence could be in documented form, or you may wish to provide an explanation of the learner's support needs.

Examples of evidence

Sources of evidence could take the form of an extract from a Learner Profile or relevant information such as:

- ◆ social work or medical reports
- ◆ psychological or medical assessments
- ◆ Individual Learning Plans
- ◆ support plans
- ◆ observations and commentary from teachers and/or pastoral care staff

Criterion 3 – Explain and provide documented evidence of how your centre determined the most appropriate assessment arrangement for each learner. This explanation should include how the decision was tailored to the learner's needs across different subjects and levels

Evidence requirements

- ◆ You must provide evidence of how the learner's difficulty has been taken into consideration in the process of deciding on the most appropriate assessment arrangements. This evidence should link any ongoing support being provided to the assessment arrangements that have been agreed across subjects and levels.
- ◆ In instances where an assessment arrangement has been provided to a learner in a previous year and the learner is going on to study at another level, the evidence should demonstrate that the centre has considered whether the assessment arrangement provided in previous years is still appropriate for the learner's needs, or whether any changes should be made.

Examples of evidence

- ◆ Naturally occurring classwork that has been used to inform subject teachers and Support for Learning staff's professional judgement
- ◆ Records of consultation and discussions between subject teachers and Support for Learning staff, which considers different subject and assessment requirements
- ◆ Forms used by teaching staff to record commentary on assessment arrangements
- ◆ Departmental meeting minutes to discuss a learner's need for an assessment arrangement.
- ◆ Details of support regularly required from subject teachers on a learner profile
- ◆ Any relevant recorded notes stored on the centre's electronic database
- ◆ Record of the decisions and rationale for the proposed assessment arrangements, including discussions with the learner about whether this is appropriate to their needs.

Criterion 4 – Provide evidence that the learner has agreed to the provision of assessment arrangements

Evidence requirements

- ◆ You must have written confirmation from the learner that they have been involved in discussions about, and have agreed to, the assessment arrangements being provided.
- ◆ If you consider that a learner aged between 12 and 16 does not have a general understanding of assessment arrangements, the learner's parent or carer must be involved in the discussion about the assessment arrangement being provided.

Examples of evidence

- ◆ Pro forma or statement signed by the learner, parent or carer where required. (In some very specific situations it may be inappropriate for learners to actually sign – alternative evidence of learner agreement will be acceptable).
- ◆ Email confirmation from the learner that they have agreed to the assessment arrangements provided.
- ◆ Signed form, e-mail or note of the discussion about a learner's assessment arrangements with the parent or carer, where appropriate.

Criterion 5 – Provide evidence of internal verification of assessment arrangements decisions

Evidence requirements

- ◆ You must have documented evidence of the meetings or discussions in which you considered relevant learner information and evidence to confirm that an assessment arrangement is appropriate.
- ◆ Your internal verification of assessment arrangements process will involve a senior manager who is not involved in the learning support process and who can objectively consider decisions based on the evidence gathered. Documented evidence for internal verification of assessment arrangement decisions must take account of this requirement and should confirm that a member of senior management is involved in verification meetings or discussions.

Examples of evidence

- ◆ Records of your approach to internal verification or authorisation of individual assessment arrangement decisions. If your senior manager does not review the evidence for all of your learners, you should explain your approach to sampling and any actions taken if issues are identified with evidence in the sample.
- ◆ Minutes, notes or records of verification meeting(s) showing internal review of evidence for learners, in electronic or paper format. Electronic or paper copy of spreadsheet recording verification decisions. These should include information on meeting date(s) and personnel involved in decisions. For example, this should include columns for recording dates, staff in attendance, or by an accompanying email to acknowledge that the s/sheet was updated.
- ◆ Minutes, notes or records from ongoing of learning support, departmental or faculty meetings at which assessment arrangements for learners have been discussed.
- ◆ Minutes of meeting - or other appropriate records - for late entries.

Retention of evidence

When you are scheduled for a quality assurance visit, we look at evidence from the previous year, relating to learners. We suggest retaining relevant evidence for the learner's assessment journey, from when you first identify a learner's need to when the learner leaves school.

You may also wish to keep evidence longer in case the learner requests copies of this historical evidence for future progression or employment opportunities as evidence of need for assessment arrangements or reasonable adjustments.

Further notes

Useful links

Assessment Arrangements Explained: Information for centres provides supporting information when considering the provision of assessment arrangements. It details the principles that apply when determining a learner's need for an assessment arrangement and how and when to request an assessment arrangement. It also describes some examples of assessment arrangements which can be provided in SQA assessments

<https://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/74922.html>

We provide a pro forma that you can use as confirmation from your learner of the assessment arrangements being provided, and that they are aware this information will be shared with us:

<http://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/14978.html>

The Assessment Arrangements Academy course is intended to develop the confidence and competence of centre staff on the application of SQA's policy and procedures in requesting assessment arrangements. <https://www.sqaacademy.org.uk/course/index.php?categoryid=158>

All other Assessment Arrangements guidance can be found here:

<http://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/14976.html>

Sources of support

If you have a query about a particular assessment arrangement, please contact the Assessment Arrangements Team on 0345 213 6890 or aarequests@sqa.org.uk.

For further up-to-date information on assessment arrangements, please visit our website.

If you have a general enquiry about SQA or our qualifications, please call our Customer Contact Centre on 0345 279 1000 or by using our enquiry form.