



NQ Awards

Qualification Verification Summary Report 2024–25

Scottish Studies: Scotland in Focus

613

Skills for Work Courses

H3YP 44 Scottish Studies: Scotland in Focus (SCQF level 4)

H3YP 45 Scottish Studies: Scotland in Focus (SCQF level 5)

H3YP 46 Scottish Studies: Scotland in Focus (SCQF level 6)

General comments

Verification for the Scotland in Focus unit was completed in May 2025 at a central verification event. Verification samples across centres included candidate evidence from levels 4, 5 and 6. In total, 18 centres submitted candidate evidence for verification, and of these, nine had their assessment judgements accepted and were able to demonstrate a sound understanding of the national standards for the unit. Nine centres had 'not accepted' judgements.

Two centres submitted incorrect evidence — only evidence for the Scotland in Focus unit should be sent for verification. Those centres sent evidence for the optional units.

Across the selection, verifiers found that most candidates were presented at an appropriate level; however, there were instances where candidates should have been assessed at a lower level or where candidates had been judged to have achieved a level when there was insufficient detail to award that level. Centres are advised to check the level of detail exemplified in the Unit Assessment Support Packs in SQA Secure.

There were still some instances of centres advising candidates to focus on more aims than required. Only one aim is required for levels 3 and 4, and two aims for levels 5 and 6. Attempting to complete more than the required number often means candidates do not have the opportunity to demonstrate their new knowledge in sufficient depth.

Centres were also reminded that aims must be related to broadening learners' knowledge of Scotland and be clearly linked to a topic which is specifically Scottish. Some topics presented this year detailed information that is universal and not unique to Scotland.

Most centres provided an internal verification policy, and some provided evidence of internal verification. Best practice was observed in some areas when assessors indicated where assessment standards had been met and provided comments. Internal verifiers also provided their assessment decisions and commentary, which was helpful to show the discussions over assessment judgements. In some cases, this was not effective in identifying issues which arose in terms of assessment judgements.

Course arrangements, unit specifications, instruments of assessment and exemplification materials

Most centres were using appropriate SQA documentation to support candidates to reach the national standard. A few centres provided documentation, which included unit specification documents, and some centres provided the verification team with the instrument of assessment used. Centres are reminded that the appropriate instrument of assessment must be included, along with the marking instructions/assessor checklists. It is perfectly acceptable for centres to use the Unit Assessment Support Packs (UASPs) on SQA Secure for these; to adapt them, or to create centre-devised approaches. Centres can submit their own assessments for prior verification.

Some centres provided the Candidate Brief that they issued to learners. It continues to be evident that using a logbook approach was beneficial to candidates. Effective logbooks included clear links to the assessment standards, space for note taking, and both candidate evaluation and assessor feedback.

Most centres used candidate and assessor checklists which are aligned to the assessment standards. Most centres used the appropriate checklists for the different levels.

Centres are advised to look at the Starter Packs on the SQA website to help with the planning and preparation of assessments.

Evidence requirements

The aims of the Scotland in Focus Unit are to enable candidates to broaden their knowledge of Scotland and to present the new learning they have discovered. Varying levels of challenge are provided at each level, and varying levels of support are appropriate. Candidates at level 3 can be given directive support, agreeing on aims and sources with their assessor. At level 4, candidates can choose their aims and sources from a list provided and be given support throughout the process. At levels 5 and 6, candidates should choose for themselves and work independently throughout the process. At level 5, assessors may answer direct questions.

The award also aims to promote personalisation and choice in both the topic and in the method of communication. This was evident in most centres.

Assessment standard 1.1

Centres are reminded that assessment standard 1.1 requires one aim for levels 3 and 4 and two for levels 5 and 6.

Candidates should not be asked for more than the required aims. A helpful approach is to ask candidates to frame their aims like a learning intention or thesis statement.

Candidates at level 3 can agree on an aim with their assessor; at level 4 it can be chosen from a list; for levels 5 and 6, two aims which are connected under a broader thematic topic are required. Aims must clearly relate to what candidates intend to learn about — something specifically Scottish. Some candidates offered insights into topics which are worldwide, with the same root causes and with the same approaches to dealing with them. This would not be considered 'Scottish' in focus but would, instead, broaden the candidate's knowledge of that particular issue. It is possible to address these issues specifically in a Scottish context by focusing on local examples and utilising data from purely Scottish sources, providing solutions tailored to the local area.

It was apparent from the candidate evidence that, in most centres, personalisation and choice were offered to learners when it came to selecting aims, and that the course broadened candidates' knowledge of Scotland. There was evidence of integrated learning and teaching across subject areas, such as English, History, Geography, and Modern Studies, allowing candidates to evidence a deepening understanding of aspects of Scotland.

Assessment standard 1.2

Assessment standard 1.2 is related to the activity chosen to achieve the candidate's aims. At level 3, candidates agree on an activity, in discussion with the assessor. At level 4, candidates choose an activity; at levels 5 and 6, candidates independently identify their own activity.

Centres should ensure that a degree of choice is given to candidates, allowing them to achieve this assessment standard. Increasingly, evidence is a report or essay, but more creative ways can be used to demonstrate achievement.

Assessment standard 1.3

For assessment standard 1.3, candidates are required to provide information about both the sources and resources they plan to use to complete their activity. At level 3, candidates are asked to agree to the specific information and resources they will use. At level 4, candidates choose these from a selection provided by the centre, and at levels 5 and 6, candidates are expected to identify them for themselves. To clarify, sources include texts, videos, interviews, and newspapers, and can be referenced in a bibliography. Resources, on the other hand, include equipment needed, such as stationery and ICT equipment.

Information from these sources should be evident in the candidate's finished product. It should be recast into the candidate's own words as far as possible, with quotations from texts identified and referenced appropriately.

Candidates should not use AI to create their final product. Some candidates used AI or lifted content from sources without proper referencing, and this over-reliance on source material meant they could not meet assessment standards 1.4 ('using this information and the resources to complete the activity in a way that helps them achieve their aims') and 2.2 ('communicating in an appropriate way').

Centres are also reminded that, for assessment standard 2.1, candidates at levels 3 and 4 will be required to communicate what they have learned. For level 4, this is characterised as having 'some detail'. At level 5 and level 6, they are also required to analyse what they have learned, and that this analysis must be 'detailed' for level 5 and 'in depth' for level 6. The method of communication should be considered when planning the project. Candidates, for example, who plan to complete a poster would find it difficult to communicate 'in depth' through this method. Additionally, a poster with that level of detail would not be effective: this method of communication is designed to be concise and engaging. However, this could be part of a portfolio of information gathered, such as through a logbook or a combination of active learning approaches through the process, including notes from discussions, candidate notes, oral presentations, electronic presentations, reflections on field trips or reading completed, etc.

At level 6, candidates must both evaluate the process they have followed and the effectiveness of their chosen method of communication. This should be a separate reflective activity, completed in depth. Some candidates had evaluated the process but not the method of communication, or vice versa, and many had not completed this activity in sufficient depth for level 6.

Administration of assessments

Several centres used logbooks as an approach to learning and teaching, and this proved to be a highly effective way of ensuring candidates met all the required assessment standards. It also allowed for supported reflection and analysis.

Centres are also reminded that there are examples of candidate evidence on SQA Secure in the Understanding Standards section, with commentary on the assessment judgements made. Additionally, there is a webinar available for centres to view on the Understanding Standards tab on the front-facing SQA Scottish Studies page. The Starter Packs for each level are also available on the Award and Unit Support Notes tab on this page, along with a guide to finding the different resources available for the Award.

Learning and teaching

Due to verification being a central event this year, there was no mechanism to discuss learning and teaching with centres. However, some centres presenting for the first time requested development visits. These helped centres to align with the expectations and national standards for the award. Most centres were presenting the award as an alternative pathway in the senior phase, with increasing numbers of centres using level 6 as a pathway for S5 and S6 learners.

A key focus for centres remains supporting learners to communicate their aims effectively. Candidates must have clearly focused aims which allow them to demonstrate their broadening knowledge of Scotland. Centres must ensure they understand what constitutes a good aim for the Scotland in Focus unit. There are examples, with commentary, on the Understanding Standards site that would help with this.

Again, some centres submitted candidate evidence where candidates provided more than one aim (for levels 3 and 4) or more than two for levels 5 and 6. This disadvantages candidates as they are then unable to provide sufficient detail because none of the aims are achieved in sufficient depth.

Candidates should be encouraged to select or identify activities that align with their individual skills. While written reports are entirely acceptable, other forms of communication, such as craft, artwork, music, an interview, a group debate, a short film, or a drama production, are also valid and may allow candidates to demonstrate their strengths more effectively. This year, activities were predominantly written responses in a report format, with some posters and presentations. There continued to be fewer occasions where outdoor learning, partnership working, or creative evidence was being utilised. It is hoped that centres will be able to return to those more activity-based and creative approaches.

Candidates should be encouraged to ensure that specific sources are clearly identified either in a logbook or in a detailed bibliography. Evaluation of sources should also be encouraged at all levels. Full URL details should be provided for websites, and generalisations such as 'Google', 'Wikipedia' and 'the BBC' should be avoided as these are not specific enough.

Using a variety of sources is preferred; candidates may be encouraged to use books, TV documentaries, interviews, surveys, and internet sources (search engines should not be cited as sources — specific websites or web pages should be referenced).

Overall assessment

Assessment judgements were in line with the national standard in half of the centres sampled this year. On re-visiting candidate evidence, almost all centres resubmitted their verification sample, and their assessment judgements were accepted.

Where candidate and assessor checklists were used, centres were more effective in their assessment judgements. These are also effective ways of providing marking instructions for the verification process.

Key areas for focus are: clear and appropriate aims, and the level of detail required for each level.

Verification

Evidence of internal verification was in place in most centres, though in some cases this process was unsuccessful. Some centres did not provide evidence of internal verification and were advised that this should be a development target. Centres are reminded that details of internal verification processes are required as part of the national verification process. Support for this is available at: www.sqa.org.uk/IVtoolkit.

Where effective evidence of internal verification was provided, the external verification (EV) team observed some examples of discussions regarding the

assessment standards, candidate evidence, and the entire verification process. Some centres included the comments of internal verifiers on candidate evidence, minutes of moderation meetings and the centre's internal verification policy. Centres should ensure that internal verification of the award occurs and that the Scotland in Focus unit is judged against its own assessment criteria, separate to the other optional units.

Many centres understood the evidence requirements. Centres using candidate and assessor checklists were able to effectively document assessment decisions and ensure that all assessment standards were being met. Comments on assessor checklists were particularly helpful to verifiers. While these are not mandatory, they significantly add to our understanding of the centre's process for assessing candidate evidence.

Centres are advised to revisit the UASPs and Understanding Standards materials on SQA Secure.

Areas of good practice reported during session 2024–25

The use of logbooks was observed in some centres. This approach was supportive to candidate success and helped ensure all assessment standards were covered.

It was clear that candidates had been given personal choice in their topics and had chosen some interesting and engaging topics that would broaden their existing knowledge of Scotland. In most centres, candidates had a wide choice for their Scotland in Focus units and had clearly made use of the personalisation and choice the course allows. Candidate engagement in the award was evident through the range of choices.

Centres using published, or amended, candidate and assessor checklists were able to clearly evidence candidate attainment. Some centres provided detailed comments on assessor checklists, which showed how and where candidates had (or had not) met the assessment standards. This is a helpful method of showing candidate achievement and allowed assessors to provide useful and effective feedback to individual candidates.

Some centres had a clear internal quality assurance policy, and procedures in place showed a focused and organised approach to internal assessment and internal verification. Feedback from assessors and verifiers was included with candidate evidence, exemplifying the effectiveness of the IV system. Some centres provided records and minutes of meetings which formed the quality assurance process, showing the planning process undertaken by the centre and actions taken for each candidate.

It was evident from all candidate evidence and in engagement with centres undertaking the verification process, that centres have motivated and enthusiastic teams who have fully engaged with Scottish Studies and the opportunities it creates for candidates.

Specific areas for improvement reported during session 2024–25

Centres should take some time to engage with candidate evidence and commentaries on the SQA Secure site for Scottish Studies to support assessment judgements for levels 4, 5 and 6, particularly in relation to the level of detail required and the way that analysis and evaluation are used at these levels. Centres should also use the Starter Packs and UASPs for each level to help them prepare for delivering the award.

Centres that received a 'not accepted' decision were advised to ensure that candidate evidence included sufficient detail for the level of presentation. Levels of presentation can be characterised as follows:

- level 3: 'basic'
- level 4: 'in some detail'
- level 5: 'in detail'
- level 6: 'in depth' and 'in detail'

Centres must ensure they understand what constitutes a good aim for the Scotland in Focus unit. There are examples with commentary available on the Understanding Standards site that would help with this. Some centres were advised to ensure that candidates had clearly focused aims which allowed them to demonstrate their broadening knowledge of Scotland.

Centres must ensure that candidates have not been over-reliant upon source material, especially when completing research online. Lifting directly from sources is not an appropriate method of communicating what they have learned. Centres must ensure that candidates have not 'lifted' content from their sources without reinterpreting, rephrasing, or recasting this information, and that candidates have not created their final product using AI.

When centres are submitting evidence for candidates who have delivered a talk or PowerPoint presentation, they must ensure that candidate evidence demonstrates that all aims have been fully achieved. This typically means that the candidate will need to include their research notes or a full, detailed script (or both), or that assessors have provided detailed comments about the content of the presentation. The most helpful approach is to have a transcript of the presentation. An example of this approach is available on SQA Secure. It is essential to document what the candidate has said, allowing the verifier to determine the appropriate level of detail and relevance to the aims.

Centres should ensure that candidates at levels 5 and 6 undertake analysis of their topic. The best approach for this is to include an evaluation of impact, effect, or importance throughout the finished product. Each aim could have its own analysis, or an overarching analysis could be completed separately if this is more appropriate to the topic. In this session, some candidates presented an analysis of aim 1 as their second aim, which meant they were unable to demonstrate new knowledge of two aims, for example:

- Aim 1: To investigate X in Scotland
- Aim 2: To evaluate the impact of X on Scotland.

This second aim, therefore, is the analysis of aim 1, meaning only one aim is covered sufficiently, instead of the two required.

At level 6, candidates must also analyse their process for completing their activity. This must be an in-depth analysis, done in detail.

Centres should ensure that there is an effective system for the internal verification of candidate evidence. Evidence of these discussions should be retained (notes on candidates' work; minutes of meetings, etc) along with the instrument of assessment and marking schemes used. Centre staff are reminded that all centres offering SQA qualifications must have an effective internal quality assurance system in place, which ensures that all candidates are assessed accurately, fairly, and consistently to national standards.

Centres can access support with this by using the Internal Verification Toolkit at: www.sqa.org.uk/IVtoolkit.

Centres are reminded that it is possible to request a development visit from the SQA verification team to support in the delivery of the Scotland in Focus unit.