National Qualifications

Qualification Verification Summary Report 2022

Core Skills: Problem Solving and Working with Others

Verification group number: 342

Introduction

The following units were verified in 2021–22:

Core Skills: Problem Solving
F3GD 10 SCQF level 4
F3GD 11 SCQF level 5
F3GD12 SCQF level 6

Core Skills: Working with Others
F3GE 10 SCQF level 4
F3GE 11 SCQF level 5
F3GE 12 SCQF level 6

Almost all centres achieved qualification verification compliance with 'high confidence' outcome ratings during session 2021–22, with some indicating 'broad confidence' where there were identified required actions. Most centres have robust internal quality assurance systems and procedures in place and utilise SQA assessment exemplar materials in Core Skills Problem Solving and Working with Others.

Centres have adapted to the delivery of National Qualifications in Core Skills Problem Solving and Working with Others during the COVID-19 pandemic (and beyond) to integrate Core Skills into programme design frameworks. There has been an increase in the level of integration between Problem Solving and Working with Others units, with one activity being used to evidence both Core Skills. There has been good linkage to other Core Skills: IT, Numeracy and Communication. Some centres attempted to integrate Core Skills delivery with a range of Personal and Social Development units (for example: Local Investigations and Enterprise Skills), but these units already have embedded Core Skills components in them. Centres must check for any embedded Core Skills components when integrating a Core Skills unit with another.

Almost all centres have a clear and accurate understanding of the requirements of Core Skills Problem Solving and Working with Others across different SCQF levels, but some need to evidence the 'process' through the planning, implementation and reviewing stages more rigorously. Individual roles need to be more clearly identified and evidenced throughout the activity. As the level increases the task set needs to be sufficiently complex to enable the candidate to critically evaluate the process.

Almost all centres continue to provide robust information in relation to QV reporting criteria:

2.1 N/A
2.4 Pre-delivery and ongoing quality checks of the assessment materials; equipment and the assessment environment.
3.2 Candidate development needs and prior achievements identified through the application and induction process and ongoing delivery of the qualification.
3.3 Providing records of scheduled contact with candidates including face to face learning and teaching and assessment delivery as well as tutorial online methods.
4.2 Evidence of internal verification sampling, standardisation and quality assurance procedures.
4.3 Assessment Instruments problem solving SQA exemplar materials and centre devised.

4.4 Assessment conditions — supervised and/or open book.

4.6 Assessment frameworks/ assessment evidence, marking guidelines and results matrices.

4.7 Retention policy and procedures.

4.9 QV reporting highlighted the need to have more informed QV feedback to staff within centres to inform assessment practice going forward.

Category 2: Resources

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

Almost all centres have rigorous systems and procedures in place to ensure pre-delivery and ongoing quality assurance checks have taken place. A few centres did not carry out the required pre-delivery checks of SQA assessment exemplars and, as such, were non-compliant with the unit standards.

Assessors and internal verifiers must ensure that pre-delivery checks of the assessment materials take place before the qualification delivery commences. Some centres failed to provide evidence that pre-delivery checks had been carried out. It is important that all assessment materials, including SQA documentation, are reviewed prior to use. A small number of centres had failed to identify inaccuracies in the wording of materials they had produced themselves when compared to the wording given in the published SQA unit specifications. A small number of centres omitted part of the assessment process of the Core Skills and failed to carry out the review process altogether.

Risk assessment policies and procedures were robust and assessors and internal verifiers understood their role in the process.

Almost all centres were well resourced with ICT and equipment suitable for the delivery of SQA National Qualifications, for example: MS Teams; Zoom; electronic portfolios; computers, iPads, or Chrome tablets; digital and paper-based evidence.

Category 3: Candidate support

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

Almost all existing centre internal systems and procedures supported candidate development needs from the pre-entry stage through the application and interview process to the ongoing support provided in the delivery of Core Skills. SQA Connect was utilised by most centres and where prior achievements were not formally recognised centres sought information from partner providers, for example guidance staff, candidate references and previously identified support records.

There was good evidence of assessors and internal verifiers 'going the extra mile' to ensure individual needs were met, especially where candidates struggled to provide written

evidence of the Core Skill. Alternative assessment methods were in use providing verbal responses; photographic/graphic evidence; assessor observations; and professional discussion.

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

Scheduled contact with the assessor is most often built into the programme design and timetabled in accordance with the learning, teaching and assessment delivery of Core Skills. At SCQF levels 3 and 4 the assessor usually adopts a very 'hands on' approach providing sustained guidance and support. At SCQF levels 5 and 6 candidates are very often expected to 'get on with it' having been simply issued with the details of the assessment and the assessment instructions provided by the assessor. This can often lead to problems if the Core Skills activity is not monitored on an ongoing basis by the assessor as candidates fail to provide the in-depth critical analysis of the process and the detail required throughout all stages of the Problem Solving or Working with Others process.

A few centres provided exemplary progress reviews and action plans tailored to specific short-, medium- and long-term timebound goals and SMART objectives.

Category 4: Internal assessment and verification

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

Internal assessment and verification systems and procedures are in place in almost all centres to ensure the standardisation of assessment in Core Skills. However, there is very little evidence to support standardisation across subject-specific programme delivery and as a result there is a wide variation in the assessment activities undertaken and in the depth of evidence provided. Vocational areas in Hairdressing; Hospitality and Child Care tend to provide exemplary evidence of naturally occurring Core Skills evidence and NQ assessors and internal verifiers can learn from this good practice within centres.

Almost all assessment decisions were consistent with National Qualifications Core Skills standards. Where the standard was not met it was very often that the task was not appropriate for the level of Core Skill and did not provide sufficient complexity for the candidate to analyse, implement and review the process. In a small number of cases, the assessment instrument (SQA exemplar) had been customised, but the standards had not been replicated accurately and there were inconsistencies in the evidence generated as a result of this. Internal assessment and verification procedures must ensure that the necessary pre-delivery and ongoing quality checks have been carried out on an annual basis and before assessment begins.

Centre assessment and internal verification procedures and policy documents were routinely made available and qualification verifiers were able to see the cycle of verification activity within a centre.

There was some evidence of standardisation meetings and discussions taking place, although a small number lacked any real dialogue about Core Skills delivery. Centres should consider how the delivery of Core Skills might be impacted by the possible move towards meta skills in the design of course frameworks in future.

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

Qualification verifiers routinely sampled assessment instruments that were developed by SQA as centres were confident in their selection and use. SQA assessment support packs were contextualised to suit the requirements of subject-specific qualification frameworks.

Activities were very often pre-set and checklists identified by the assessor to enable candidates to carry out Core Skills tasks. In a small number of cases, there was no recognition by the assessor that the activity was wholly inappropriate for the level of the Core Skill. For example, an icebreaker task may have been part of the induction stage to the programme delivery, but such a task is unlikely to provide the depth of evidence required to prove competence in a Core Skill. Similarly, at a higher level, the activity lacked sufficient complexity for the candidate to generate the required evidence.

Some centres were more confident combining the delivery of one or more Core Skills, while a few set a detailed task that could have generated evidence for both Core Skills units (Problem Solving and Working with Others) but did not combine delivery, meaning their candidates had to evidence a second Core Skill using a completely different task.

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

All centres provided internal quality assurance policy documents including internal processes and procedures, particularly in respect of malpractice and plagiarism. Most provided information relating to the induction process and the requirement for candidates to sign authenticity declarations.

Centres should note that SQA qualification verifiers have been requested to ensure that this criterion is discussed in more detail during QV activities in session 2022–23. This pertains to SQA's external audit requirements to ensure that centre assessment arrangements comply with SQA qualification requirements and assessment conditions.

Centres may wish to refer to SQA published guidance — Qualification Verification Criteria: Guidance for Centres March 2019 Appendix A Criteria 4.4 (pages 19-22), which explains clearly how a centre can comply when implementing a range of different assessment conditions.

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

Almost all QV reports during session 2021–22 indicated that candidate evidence of NQ Core Skills met the national standard. However, it was noted that there needs to be more attention paid to the analysis of roles and the need to encourage and support candidates to be more reflective in the analysis of the activity itself and in all stages of the process, for example planning, implementation and reviewing.

Assessors and internal verifiers need to focus more on the Core Skill components when assessing Core Skills:

♦ Problem Solving: Critical Thinking; Planning and Organising; and Reviewing and Evaluating
♦ Working with Others: Working Co-operatively with Others; and Reviewing the Co-operative Contribution

For more information centres may wish to access SQA's Core Skills Framework: An Introduction at the following link:
https://www.sqa.org.uk/files_ccc/CombinedCoreSkillsFrameworkV1.pdf

A few centres had inappropriate assessment checklists that did not reflect the full requirements of the Core Skills unit. More than a few did not ensure the Core Skills activity was sufficiently complex enough to meet the unit assessment requirements across the three-stage process of planning; carrying out the task; and reviewing and evaluating. It is very important at SCQF levels 5 and 6 that candidates are instructed to establish a set of criteria in order to critically evaluate the Problem Solving or Working with Others process.

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

All centres continue to retain candidate evidence in line with SQA requirements, and longer if necessary. Candidate evidence may be retained for longer periods by some centres due to other awarding bodies and/or funding requirements. This can vary from the minimum requirement of three weeks to one year and beyond.

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

QV reports indicate that most centres routinely disseminate reports to staff using internal shared systems and procedures. Centres continue to retain QV reports electronically, thus giving free access to all assessors, verifiers and relevant staff.

Some centres ensure assessors and verifiers have an opportunity to discuss the QV report in a standing agenda item at the next scheduled standardisation meeting. More than a few centres need to ensure that qualification verification feedback is used to inform assessment practice and that this is clearly evidenced in standardisation meeting records.

Areas of good practice reported by qualification verifiers

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

♦ Activities for Problem Solving and Working with Others were suitably contextualised to the programme delivery in Hairdressing, Hospitality and Child Care contexts.

♦ Where the need for a step-by-step approach was recognised in the delivery of Problem Solving, various strategies were adopted to address the problem. There was a clear recognition that it is not always possible to identify one correct solution. Candidates should be encouraged to reflect equally on what worked and what did not work when reviewing the process.

♦ Activities for Working with Others were sufficiently challenging to generate the required evidence, although often carried out in small groups of two or more people.

Specific areas for development

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

♦ Centres must ensure individual roles within the Core Skills activity are made clear and that candidates provide sufficient details of their contribution to the activity/tasks.

♦ Centres must ensure that internal pre-delivery quality assurance checks have been carried out before commencing qualification delivery. All assessment instruments, including SQA exemplar materials, should be checked on an annual basis for currency and validity.

♦ Centres need to check other units for Core Skills components when integrating a Core Skills unit with another unit. For example, if the unit contains one or more components of Problem Solving or Working with Others then the activity needs to acknowledge this and ensure the candidate is not being asked to complete the full Core Skill where recognition has already been identified within the subject-specific unit specification.

♦ Internal assessment and verification of Core Skills needs to be more proactive and not limited to being undertaken at the end of the unit delivery when it is much more difficult to remediate or re-assess.

♦ Assessment tasks need to reflect the level of the Core Skill and the higher the level the more complex the task needs to be. Assessors need to ensure the task undertaken by the candidate will generate the evidence required for the Core Skill.

♦ Candidates need to be able to critically evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the entire problem solving/working with others process at SCQF levels 5 and 6 (throughout all stages of the process).

♦ Centres may wish to consider the potential impact to Core Skills vocational programme delivery of current SQA developments taking place to embed meta skills into HN qualification frameworks (Next Gen: HN and Skills 4.0).