



National Qualifications

Qualification Verification Summary Report 2024–25

Skills for Work: Early Learning and Childcare

416

Skills for Work Courses

The Skills for Work Course frameworks in Early Learning and Childcare consists of three mandatory units with one optional unit.

Skills for Work: Early Learning and Childcare National 4 (SCQF level 4)

Group Award code: C782 74 (24 SCQF credit points)

Mandatory Units

HX1R 74 Play in Early Learning and Childcare

HX1L 74 Child Development

HX1V 74 Working in Early Learning and Childcare

Optional Units (one to be selected)

HX1K 74 Care of Children

HX1M 74 Contemporary Families

HX1T 74 Maintenance of a Safe Environment for Children

Skills for Work: Early Learning and Childcare National 5 (SCQF level 5)

Group Award code: C783 75 (24 SCQF credit points)

Mandatory Units

HX1R 75 Play in Early Learning and Childcare

HC3C 45 Development and Wellbeing of Children and Young People

HX1V 75 Working in Early Learning and Childcare

Optional Units (one to be selected)

HX1J 75 Care and Feeding of Children and Young People

HX1M 75 Contemporary Families

J54S 75 Introduction to Basic First Aid

HC38 45 Children and Young People: Rights and Protection

General comments

The 2024–25 academic session marked a significant progression in innovative delivery models of Skills for Work: Early Learning and Childcare courses. External Verifiers observed centres enthusiastically engaging with qualification delivery grounded in the 'Skills for Work ethos', emphasising experiential learning, employability competences, fostering positive learning attitudes, and strengthening workplace readiness for the early learning and childcare sector.

External Verifiers identified that centres were prioritising:

- ♦ interactive play-based methodologies

- ◆ hands-on experiential learning opportunities
- ◆ creative and imaginative pedagogical approaches
- ◆ collaborative learning environments
- ◆ comprehensive employability skills development

The verification process confirmed that centres consistently delivered high-quality Skills for Work: Early Learning and Childcare programmes, provided effective learning experiences with comprehensive candidate support, underpinned by rigorous quality assurance frameworks.

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

Throughout the 2024–25 session, external verifiers confirmed that assessors and internal verifiers demonstrated competence in discussing programme arrangements, unit specifications, and use of assessment instruments. This was evidenced thorough their knowledge and understanding across all Skills for Work: Early Learning and Childcare components and unit delivery.

Evidence requirements

Centres delivering Skills for Work: Early Learning and Childcare at National 4 and 5 demonstrated strong adherence to prescribed evidence requirements during the 2024–25 session. The predominantly practice-based approach incorporated observation methodologies, practical candidate activities, collaborative teamwork, and peer evaluation processes. These assessment strategies proved valid, with assessment decisions demonstrating reliability, consistency, and alignment with unit evidence specifications. This confirmed robust understanding of Skills for Work: Early Learning and Childcare unit evidence requirements and SCQF level differentiation.

External verifiers recognised that centres were implementing the experiential and reflective assessment methodologies encouraged within unit evidence requirements and supported by the Skills for Work ethos. The evidence requirements accommodate a variety of methods to assess candidate knowledge, understanding, and practical application across the outcomes and performance criteria. This ensures candidates fulfil evidence standards while demonstrating achievement of all outcomes and criteria.

Administration of assessments

Most centres were using SQA Assessment Support Packs (ASPs) for unit assessment delivery. These resources provide a variety of assessment formats

which provide choice for candidates, while ensuring accessibility for all candidates with success potential.

Most centres provided External Verifiers with marking schemes, assessment checklists, and evaluation records for verified units, demonstrating validity and practicability.

Learning and teaching

External Verifiers identified centres' commitment to delivering exceptional teaching and learning experiences for candidates this session. Most centres provided comprehensive opportunities with learning focused on unit requirements, while delivering extensive knowledge across the early learning and childcare sector. Many centres demonstrated clear emphasis on experiential learning, practical experience-based teaching methods, and reflective learning processes. External verifiers documented exemplary learning examples in authentic or simulated early learning and childcare environments, outdoor play, role-play activities, case study and research projects, practical task planning and implementation, and self-reflection on personal skills, knowledge, and values.

Overall assessment

Throughout this session, external verifiers confirmed that most centres adhered to fundamental assessment principles within Skills for Work: Early Learning and Childcare course delivery. Assessment approaches were valid, with appropriate methodologies enabling candidates to demonstrate knowledge, understanding, and skills meeting required standards; reliability with consistent assessment outcomes across candidates, assessors, and centres; equity and fairness without unnecessary assessment barriers; and practicability through effective and efficient administration.

External verifiers identified consistent assessment approaches across assessors, with comprehensive records and assessment judgment checklists available during verification. Assessment decisions were typically communicated to candidates in both verbal and written format, with constructive feedback highlighting strengths, and indicating development areas. Evidence demonstrated remediation opportunities and candidate development support. Regular feedback constituted an integral component of learning, teaching, and assessment processes for most centres delivering Skills for Work: Early Learning and Childcare units.

Verification

External verification activities confirmed that most centres followed SQA verification guidance, implementing comprehensive three-step approaches incorporating prior, interim, and post-verification processes with documented standardisation meetings at each stage.

Centres provided internal verification policies and completed verification documentation including sampling plans, meeting records, and verification feedback and maintained standardised verification documentation for sampled units. Most centres evidenced effective internal verification procedures resulting in verification samples that demonstrated a high level of consistency. Internal verifiers provided focused, detailed commentary clearly demonstrating assessment judgment rationale, with documented professional dialogue between assessors and internal verifiers.

Some centres demonstrated internal verification implementation across multiple course delivery centres through reciprocal agreements, supporting and strengthening standardisation processes. This model is increasingly being adopted across centres.

External verifiers confirmed that verification approaches demonstrated candidate fairness, quality assured delivery and assessment, maintained Skills for Work: Early Learning and Childcare integrity and credibility, and ensured consistent standards.

Areas of good practice reported during session 2024–25

Skills for Work ethos

External Verifiers found a strong commitment by centres using the Skills for Work ethos of practice based experiential learning, and identified some of the following as examples of good practice:

- ◆ Practical workplace experiences: regular workplace blocks throughout the academic year in nursery and primary settings, enabling hands-on interactions with children, and real-time application of theory.
- ◆ Professional feedback integration: candidates receive feedback on their skills and abilities from professionals within placement settings.
- ◆ Reflective practice development: focused learning intentions and success criteria that develop reflective approaches to learning and practice.
- ◆ Theory-to-practice links: effective integration of theoretical knowledge with practical application through structured placements and real-world experiences.
- ◆ Career pathway insights: clear connections made between course content and future career opportunities, with candidates progressing to further education, Modern Apprenticeships, and university.

Creativity and innovative practice

External verifiers highlighted some excellent examples of creative and innovative approaches including:

- ◆ Sustainability projects: collaborative projects with nurseries involving planting seeds and bulbs, integrating environmental awareness with childcare skills.

- ◆ Outdoor play experiences: offering spaces for active play and woodland walks, forest opportunities, street play activities, den building, use of school grounds, local parks, woodlands and beaches, to further experience outdoor play.
- ◆ Story sack creation: candidates create personalised story sacks from scratch, selecting appropriate books and developing themed play experiences for children.
- ◆ Cross-curricular integration: evidence used across multiple subjects, demonstrating creative assessment approaches.
- ◆ Multi-sensory learning: use of various teaching spaces including kitchens for practical sessions, outdoor spaces for active play, and specialised environments for different learning objectives.
- ◆ Creative assessment methods: implementation of candidate workbooks alongside assessment support workbooks to better prepare candidates for academic progression.

Support for candidates

External verifiers found comprehensive support mechanisms for all candidates, including:

- ◆ Individualised assessment support: tailored coursework and assessment support for candidates who require it, ensuring success for all participants.
- ◆ Additional support needs accommodation: specific provisions for candidates with additional support needs, maintaining high standards, while providing necessary adaptations.
- ◆ Confidence building: documented improvements in candidate confidence through practical experiences and supportive teaching approaches.
- ◆ Peer support systems: opportunities for peer review and group working balanced with independent learning to build various skill sets.
- ◆ Career guidance integration with clear progression pathways highlighted from National 4 through to Higher levels, with comprehensive information available to candidates and parents.

Quality assurance

External verifiers found in many centres robust quality assurance practices, including:

- ◆ Internal verification systems: strong internal verification processes supporting assessors and ensuring consistent standards, and a high standard of evidence sampling across all units, with comprehensive documentation of learning outcomes and evidence requirements verified.
- ◆ Cross-centre collaboration: many centres had quality assurance and improvement arrangements with other local centres, ensuring standardisation and sharing of best practice. In some cases formal networks were in place providing support, sharing and standardisation.
- ◆ Continuous evaluation: many assessors and internal verifiers effectively evaluate course delivery and identify areas for development and enhancement.

Use of digital technology

During verification, many centres were using a variety of digital resources and tools to support the learning and assessment of candidates:

- ◆ Digital technology — centres are embedding the use of digital learning and teaching resources, and online learning platforms such as 'Google classroom' and 'Microsoft Teams', to enhance and support learning and engagement.
- ◆ Electronic learning tools: use of electronic dolls and Smart Baby technology to enhance practical learning experiences.
- ◆ Digital evidence collection: use of digital voice recordings, photos and videos and social media tools, to demonstrate and document practical skills and knowledge to support peer review and assessment.

Community involvement

External verifiers were pleased to find such extensive community engagement:

- ◆ Nursery and primary school partnerships: established positive partnerships with local community nurseries and primary schools, out of school care and so on providing regular visits and placements throughout the academic year, enabling a diverse age-range experience for candidates.
- ◆ Community organisation projects: collaboration with library, toddler and stay-and-play groups, to support book selection and story development activities; play practice, and even local churches on intergenerational projects connecting candidates with elderly community members.
- ◆ School collaboration and initiatives: candidates facilitating creche services during parents' evenings, supporting transitions from primary to secondary, engaging in school 'buddy' systems and participating in community events.
- ◆ Professional speakers: regular visits from professionals across the early learning and childcare, and playwork sectors, including education, health and social services, such as social workers, midwives, and educational psychologists.
- ◆ Real employment outcomes: direct pathways to employment in local settings, with candidates gaining positions in partner organisations.

Specific areas for improvement reported during session 2024–25

Internal verification and quality assurance

Whilst many centres had comprehensive quality assurance processes, External Verifiers highlighted the following areas for improvement in some centres:

Documentation and process requirements

- ◆ Internal verification documentation: centres have been advised to ensure all required internal verification documentation is completed and available for future verification events.
- ◆ Informal process recording: centres are strongly advised to record discussions and meetings to provide ongoing evidence of the internal verification process and improve reliability.
- ◆ SQA Toolkit utilisation: assessors and internal verifiers have been referred to the SQA Internal Verification Toolkit (www.sqa.org.uk/IV/toolkit) for guidance.

Standardisation and assessment practices

- ◆ Over-assessment issues: some centres were advised to review centre-devised assessments because candidates are being over-assessed throughout all verified units, and to ensure that centre-devised assessments are prior verified to provide further guidance and enhance quality assurance.
- ◆ Evidence requirements compliance: some centres were reminded to ensure proper understanding of specific evidence requirements for units (such as the Working in Early Learning and Childcare evidence requirements for different outcomes) and ensure referrals are made back to the Assessment Support Pack (ASP) and unit specifications to confirm the requirements for each outcome.

Course structure and delivery

External verifiers highlighted a few areas for development in the delivery of courses:

- ◆ Skills for Work ethos: better alignment with Skills for Work ethos of experiential learning, employability competences, fostering positive learning attitudes and strengthening workplace readiness for the early learning and childcare sector.
- ◆ Experiential focus enhancement: greater emphasis needed on experiential learning rather than theoretical approaches, with emphasis on experiential learning, reflective practice and creativity and innovation.
- ◆ Regular review processes: implementation of ongoing reviews of assessment approaches to maintain alignment with ASP guidance.
- ◆ Community opportunities: centres should be looking to increase opportunities for guest speakers and outside organisations, such as BookBug sessions; childcare practitioners; health visitors; neonatal nurses; midwives.
- ◆ Placement experience extension: although not required within the units, the potential to extend placement experiences with opportunities to develop further links with local nurseries and primary schools is recommended.
- ◆ Professional development: a need for continued professional development in assessment practices and Skills for Work methodology.
- ◆ Collaborative networks: development of stronger collaborative networks between centres for shared learning and resource development.

Specific unit feedback

HX1R 75 Play in Early Learning and Childcare National 5

- ◆ Outdoor play and natural materials experience: candidates should be given opportunities to experience play with natural materials and to experience outdoor play in the natural world in line with current early learning and play pedagogy.
- ◆ Forest kindergarten opportunities: centres are encouraged to explore Forest Kindergarten sites and Forest Centre opportunities through local Rangers or placement providers.
- ◆ Alternative play engagement: if regular placements aren't accessible, centres should identify alternative opportunities such as undertaking play with younger candidates within the centre, visiting toddler groups and local nurseries/primaries, engaging with online storytelling with local nurseries, stay and play sessions in libraries, etc.

HX1V 75 Working in Early Learning and Childcare National 5

- ◆ Need to ensure evidence for outcome 1(a) shows identification of various provision types for both children and young people.
- ◆ Balanced evidence coverage: outcome 1(b) and 1(c) must include a minimum of one explanation relating to children and a minimum of one explanation relating to young people.
- ◆ Experiential learning integration: overall aim to include more experiential learning and activities to support theory across all delivered units.
- ◆ Centres are also advised to ensure use of Scottish sources to support this unit, such as Skills Development Scotland, My World of Work; Scottish Social Services Council; Scotland's Care Inspectorate.