**Scottish Vocational Qualifications**
**Qualification Verification Summary Report 2021**

# Horticulture

**Verification group number: 146**

# Introduction

In academic session 2020–21 there were eight centres visited by external verifiers for SVQs covering the following awards:

GH7E 23   SVQ Parks, Gardens and Green Space at SCQF level 6
GH7C 23   SVQ Landscaping at SCQF level 6
GH79 22   SVQ Horticulture at SCQF level 5
GH7D 22   SVQ Parks, Gardens and Green Space at SCQF level 5
G9HV 21   SVQ Horticulture at SCQF level 4

Four of the centres visited were Scottish further education colleges, two were local authorities and two were private training providers.

A further four centres had visits deferred until next session due to a lack of candidate evidence being available.

All recommendations resulting from previous session visits had been addressed.

There was no verification activity for Higher National awards within the verification group.

Most visits resulted in a high confidence rating with some receiving a reasonable confidence rating. There was only one main point for action which related to internal verification activity. In addition there were some recommendations resulting from the visits.

Almost all centres had done a great deal of work in supporting candidates during a difficult time. Verifiers were confident that the overall standards of the qualifications are being maintained.

# Category 2: Resources

**Criterion 2.1: Assessors and internal verifiers must be competent to assess and internally verify, in line with the requirements of the qualification.**

For SVQ provision, all assessors and verifiers held appropriate technical qualifications for the assessment and verification of the awards. In most centres staff were qualified to HND or degree level in horticulture. Almost all had the appropriate assessor/verifier awards with the remaining few working towards them. The assessors and verifiers had a wide range of practical experience including from local authorities, the National Trust, landscape companies, nurseries and garden centres.

All assessors and verifiers had assessment and/or verification roles detailed in their job description and most have many years' experience in carrying out assessment and verification.

In all centres, staff CVs and up-to-date continuing professional development (CPD) records were available. All staff had access to CPD through their centre. Due to the prevailing conditions CPD opportunities were very limited, but many centres continued with virtual CPD events. Most of the CPD undertaken related to new ways of working, including use of new technology.

Some centres undertook CPD relating to the development of materials for the revised awards while others had examples of CPD of specific relevance to their candidate groups, for example supporting looked-after young people.

In the very few centres that had new staff, there were good induction and support mechanisms for these staff.

**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 carried out reviews of material and resources on a regular basis and units were subject to a pre-delivery check in accordance with the centre quality procedures. The materials from a small number of centres would have benefitted from more detailed cross-referencing to the National Occupational Standards (NOS) and updating of terminology.

Where centres use sites other than their own for assessment of practical work there were formal agreements or a lease in place and appropriate site selection checklists were completed. All centres carried out practical work on suitable sites and were well resourced for delivery and assessment of the awards. The awards are delivered at a wide range of suitable sites including public parks, community and heritage sites, and private landscaped areas (housing associations and private gardens).

# Category 3: Candidate support

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

Many centres recruit candidates directly for the programmes while a few centres are sent candidates by employers to attend on a day-release basis. There is a range of mechanisms in place in centres to ensure candidates are matched to the appropriate qualification and level. Some centres offer taster days where candidates can find out more about the programmes, others have formal interviews to identify the expectations and needs of individual candidates.

In some centres candidates are automatically given Core Skills testing as part of the entry process while others carry it out at the start of the programme. Where candidates are sent from employers a few of the centres are involved in the recruitment process in partnership with the employer. All centres identify candidate support needs during the recruitment process, and all have mechanisms in place to provide additional support to candidates if required. This can include referral to a third party or to other sections within the organisation. The nature of support varies according to the centre and the candidate needs but can include readers, scribes or the provision of classroom assistants.

Almost all candidates who were interviewed as part of verification activity were very happy with the support they had received during periods of remote learning and specifically the continued contact from assessors when work had to be paused. Other specific support for remote learning included the provision of laptops and dongles at some centres and the setting up of candidate-led support groups at others.

Where candidates were from employers the staff there also had a role in candidate support, including the provision of an allocated mentor or workplace supervisor.

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

At all centres contact with assessors had varied during the session as the restrictions on meetings changed but almost all had implemented a revised learning programme with more work being carried out remotely. All centres had made changes to assessment planning with the individual candidates, and these were reviewed on an ongoing basis. Progress reviews take place on a regular basis and with employed candidates these have taken place at a virtual meeting between the assessor, candidate and their manager to discuss progress, consider resource needs and plan work. Almost all portfolios included tracking sheets to enable candidates to monitor their progress.

## Category 4: Internal assessment and verification

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

All centres have an internal verification policy in place and in almost all cases this was comprehensive and had been reviewed recently. In almost all centres candidates' work had been internally verified effectively in accordance with this policy. However, a small number of centres did not carry out effective internal verification in accordance with their policies, specifically the completion of pre-delivery checks and timeous feedback to assessors on verification activity.

In almost all centres the policy states that assessments undergo a pre-delivery check and units of the award are internally verified a minimum of once every three years.

All centres have standard internal verification forms which were used to record the results of internal verification.

All centres have records of standardisation meetings to ensure consistency of assessment practice. Many of these have been held virtually. In some centres standardisation meetings take place on a regular basis while in others standardisation forms part of a wider meeting agenda. In smaller centres this can be informal and recorded in a log rather than with formal minutes.

Centres used a range of methods for recording standardisation discussions including a 'change to assessment' folder, a 'record of discussion' log or formal action minutes to record any relevant changes.

Formal observation of live practical assessment was not possible at verification visits this session.

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

There is a wide range of assessment instruments used for assessment of the awards across centres. The most common are assessor observation checklists and underpinning knowledge questions but many centres provide additional supporting evidence such as photographs, identification tests, log books, personal statements, witness testimonies, propagation logs and records of work. In almost all centres all assessment instruments are clearly cross-referenced to the LANTRA National Occupational Standards.

The change in delivery method for this session has resulted in some changes to assessment practices with more integration of assessments taking place in many centres.

All centres use a portfolio-based approach where assessment materials are gathered together. Most centres provided assessment evidence in electronic format and of those that were still using paper portfolios all but one was actively exploring the use of e-portfolios for future candidates. In almost all cases the portfolios were well laid out with clear cross-referencing. There were a few centres where minor changes were suggested, for example avoiding the use of incorrect terminology such as 'outcome' or removal of personal candidate information from the portfolio.

ICT and in particular virtual learning environments and electronic portfolios were used to record assessment evidence including answers to underpinning knowledge questions and photographs of practical activity.

A few centres had a generic evidence section in the portfolio where items common to a number of units were kept, for example tool identification, plant profiles and pest/disease recognition.

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

All centres had candidate information on malpractice, including plagiarism, which was available either as a written statement or a statement available on the VLE. In all centres plagiarism and malpractice are covered as part of the candidate induction process.

Many centres had introduced additional authenticity checks due to the increased use of electronic evidence including individual declarations for each piece of evidence and inclusion of email trails submitted with evidence.

In all centres it was clear that work was that of the individual candidates. Practical work is still mainly covered by assessor observation checklists

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

At all centres the underpinning knowledge questions completed by candidates were marked and signed by the assessor. In most cases candidates were given feedback on their knowledge answers which was constructive, and remediation provided an appropriate level of guidance to candidates where necessary. The answers given by candidates were, in almost all cases, good or very good and appropriate for the level of study. In a few centres staff should ensure that all questions are answered fully and where verbal clarification has been sought this should be annotated as such.

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

All materials requested during visit planning were made available, either in paper or electronic format, prior to the virtual verification event. All centres have a policy on the retention of materials for the purpose of internal and external verification and these had been implemented. All centre staff were aware of the SQA policy in relation to retention of evidence for quality assurance purposes. In reality many centres retain portfolios with assessment evidence well beyond the SQA required date for other audit purposes.

An increasing number of centres hold master packs containing assessment materials for the awards electronically on drives that only staff have access to. In all centres the portfolios and assessment materials were held securely either electronically or in locked cupboards/areas only staff had access to.

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

In all Scottish further education college centres that were verified the responsibility for dissemination of feedback, including external verification reports, lies within a quality unit. The staff in the quality unit are responsible for circulating the verification reports to relevant managers and assessors/verifiers. The reports are then discussed at a section, team or course meeting and actions agreed and actioned. In other centres the reports are circulated, usually by the SQA co-ordinator or head of centre, to relevant staff for discussion and action.

In all centres staff interviewed were aware of the contents of previous reports. Reference to the content of previous reports was included in either standardisation meeting minutes or in action logs where actions were detailed and signed off when complete.

# Areas of good practice reported by qualification verifiers

The following good practice was reported during session 2020–21:

♦ The contact and support given by assessors to candidates during periods of remote working.
♦ Use of standardisation logs to record actions, suggested solutions and the completed action.
♦ The digital recording of candidate progress, accessible to both candidates and assessors.

# Specific areas for development

The following areas for development were reported during session 2020–21:

♦ More timeous feedback on internal verification reports from the internal verifier to the assessor required.
♦ Completion of pre-delivery checks ahead of delivery, and in accordance with the centre policy should be carried out.