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Scottish Vocational Qualifications

Qualification Verification Summary Report 2022

Workplace Core Skills: Communication

Verification group number: 339

Introduction

This report covers the external qualification verification of Workplace Core Skills: Communication units during session 2021–22. External verifiers visited various centres, including private training providers, local councils, and colleges, that were offering training to workplace-based candidates across Scotland.

The units selected for verification were:

F425 04 Workplace Core Skills: Communication (SCQF level 3)
F426 04 Workplace Core Skills: Communication (SCQF level 4)
F427 04 Workplace Core Skills: Communication (SCQF level 5)
F428 04 Workplace Core Skills: Communication (SCQF level 6)

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.

Staff in all centres were qualified to deliver regulated qualifications as assessors or internal verifiers. Many of these staff hold both qualifications. A few centres had some staff who were undertaking training in assessor and internal verifier awards. Nearly all centres showed evidence of their staff's industry qualifications.

All centres presented detailed CPD records for their staff, as scanned copies of physical documents or in electronic forms in centre learning management systems (LMS). These systems offer management the ability to evaluate CPD activity and staff's success in them. However, one centre presented CPD records to external verification in its LMS that were incomplete in terms of detail of activities and dates.

Some centres offer their own, in-house assessment and verification training to new staff. Many centres require staff to update their CPD records on a regular basis with clear timelines. Some centres operate a buddy system for new staff. One centre requires that staff complete three CPD activities within an 18 month period, one of which is to shadow the work of another member of staff.

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

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a great impact on the ability of centres to deliver Core Skills: Communication safely or to deliver it at all. However, site selection checklists, risk assessments and IT checklists were found in all centres. Some centres showed evidence of industry health and safety reviews undertaken by employers in learners' workplaces.

Technology supported delivery. Some centres use learning management systems such as OneFile. These offered useful organisation to learners and delivery teams. Learners can access the systems on their own devices from home. Especially through the pandemic,

many industries closed and some learners in some centres were able safely to continue their learning in Core Skills: Communication. In many centres a blended version of this practice continues.

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 centres have initial interviews and induction for learners new to their training programmes. These include information about various centre policies, and it is a time to assess learners' correct Core Skills: Communication levels for the course ahead. However, there are some centres that observe learners and decide Core Skills: Communication levels over a period of four to six weeks.

At induction, most centres use SQA Connect/Navigator to find their learners' Core Skills profiles. Where appropriate, a learner's Core Skills profile can be used to contribute towards the achievement of the Core Skills units through accreditation of prior learning (APL). Some centres will also have stakeholders' initial assessments of learners' skills to consult.

Some centres give learners their own initial assessments to help identify Core Skills: Communication levels and any support needs that learners may have. All centres assess the support needs of learners and give individual learning support plans to those who require them. Most centres have additional support and equal opportunities policies. In one centre, for learners whose first language is not English, an assessor read questions to learners to ensure understanding. Some centres use e-learning platforms such as Skills Forward and SkillScan for initial assessment of functional skills and diagnostics in learning preferences to assist the identification of learners' needs.

One college centre gave returning learners, who were trained to the highest Core Skills: Communication level, repeat versions of the same unit. This training was not certificated but was considered valuable current skills training. This was a lost opportunity to progress the learners' training. Other units could be placed in the learner's training plan or in-house, industry research projects could be created to further the learner's independent learning and communication skills.

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

Assessors of Core Skills: Communication in the workplace are organised, flexible and learner-led, so they can deliver individualised learning effectively. All centres make regular contact with their learners, but the frequency of visits can vary in different centres. Some centres arrange bi-monthly visits while others may visit learners three times in 18 months. In some areas like Hairdressing and Beauty, many learners work with their assessors on site.

Visit plans for progress reviews allow work rates to be set that suit individual learners. Individualised plans for more independent learners mean they will meet less frequently with

assessors, but they can still contact assessors by phone or email. This leaves assessors extra time to support learners who rely more on face-to-face interactions.

Technology supports learners' effective contact with assessors. Through the pandemic particularly, contact this way has matured and diversified. Centres' learning management systems allow learners to review their own progress more readily. Some assessors ask learners about their preferred method of communication and adopt this in their practice. Contact is maintained between learners and assessors by Microsoft Teams, phone, text, FaceTime and social media apps like WhatsApp. Social media, especially, is very useful for dealing with incidental or quick queries.

Category 4: Internal assessment and verification

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

Almost all assessors and internal verifiers are skilled at supporting their learners at distance and online. In some centres, there was good practice but a lack of clear, recorded evidence in work presented for external verification. For example, verification was effective in most centres, but there was little evidence of written feedback between internal verifier and assessor in many centres.

Some centres use learning management systems, and while assessor and internal verifier feedback can be placed in learners' e-portfolios, this can be overlooked amid other, automated quality assurance functions. In other centres, internal verification forms with the names of assessor and internal verifier provided no evidence of how assessment decisions were matched to Core Skills: Communication standards. This evidence is important as a document of the centre's working standardisation practices.

All centres presented evidence of assessor and internal verification policies. Many centres use the three stages of verification model. Some centres verify all assessors' work. In one centre, assessors were monitored by the centre's learning management system that calculated the number of issues raised by internal verifiers for each assessor. This decided sample size for assessors in subsequent assessment cycles.

Almost all centres had regular standardisation meetings. Many of these were discrete Core Skills: Communication meetings. Many others featured Core Skills: Communication as a regular or occasional agenda item. The number of standardisation meetings that took place annually varied between centres, ranging from monthly to yearly meetings.

Centre-devised tasks based on naturally occurring evidence were mostly designed well to reflect SQA standards. The Core Skills staff of one large centre met online once a month for Group Review Involving Peers (GRiP) meetings. Staff from different sites shared practice, asked questions and found answers. However, while this practice was effective, there was a lack of written records of these standardisation events.

In many centres there was little or no evidence of the internal verification of learning materials. Some centre-devised materials were limited and did not represent Core Skills: Communication standards. One centre used the exemplar reading text from the level 5, Core

Skills: Communication assessment support pack as its summative reading piece. This is not a legitimate approach. Some centres must match their practices to Core Skills: Communication standards more closely. This would resolve many issues of non-compliance.

Another centre did not present reading texts with learners' reading assessments. The centre's rationale was that these were confidential documents used in the learners' workplaces. This is not an acceptable approach to Task 1: Reading. Reading texts are necessary for verification. If this evidence is not presented, external verifiers have no choice but to ask the centre to remediate the situation.

There was further confusion with naturally occurring evidence, and with Core Skills mapping in Modern Apprenticeships in a few centres. These are discussed in detail at the end of this report.

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

There was evidence of excellent practice in many centres, this year. SQA Core Skills Communication assessment support packs were used for guidance, and recording documents such as assessment checklists were used directly.

Many centres created contextualised tasks that integrated Core Skills Communication units with learners' other units. Some centres asked learners to make e-portfolios in their learning management systems and used a variety of approaches to build evidence.

Most centres used technology to support learners. One centre used video recording software where learners presented online without seeing themselves on screen, but with those receiving the call able to see both the presentation and the learner. This helped self-conscious learners be more confident, while assessors were able to observe learners' non-verbal communication effectively in Task 3: Speaking and Listening.

However, there were some centres that did not present evidence of standardised Core Skills Communication practice.

Task 1: Reading

Many centres did not present marking guidance with reading texts. This guidance helps assessors ensure that standards are not missed in learners' work. One centre used reading texts at level 5 that ranged between 2000 and 5000 words. Learners cannot make a useful, short summary of texts of this length, or make a cohesive evaluation. This leads to over-assessment.

Task 2: Writing

One centre used a record of professional discussion with learners as evidence of the writing task. This is not an acceptable approach. Learners must be assessed on their writing ability. Reasonable adjustments may be made for additional support needs. One centre conducted the writing assessment by collecting learners' work from different tasks. Evidence for the writing task must be taken from one assessment task.

Task 3: Speaking and Listening

Many centres did not provide enough guidance to learners on how to achieve the task. Some centres did not present detailed assessment checklists as evidence of learners' success in the task, particularly in the absence of video or audio recordings.

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

All centres have robust induction procedures that include taking learners through the centre's policies. These include policies on plagiarism and malpractice. Learners sign disclaimers at this stage, and sometimes at the end of their courses, to confirm that their work is authentic. Many centres also require learners to sign and date their assessment work, although it is not always clear that this is a statement of authenticity. Some centres ask learners to upload their work to the centre's learning management system where it is authenticated by the system and dated.

Many learners work on site with their assessors, which can offer robust authentication of learners' work.

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

Assessors and internal verifiers in most centres made effective assessment decisions for their learners. Evidence of assessment, in almost all centres, was contextualised and apparently produced by naturally occurring opportunities. Feedback to learners was always individualised, positive and constructive.

However, in some centres there were issues with assessor and internal verifier decisions.

Task 1: Reading

A few centres presented reading assessments in which there was no evaluation. A couple of centres presented pictures of learners' computers as sole evidence of summative assessment. This is not a valid assessment approach. There was misunderstanding in a few instances where assessors thought the overall object of the reading task was to demonstrate that learners could read.

Task 2: Writing

A few centres presented summative writing assessments at level 5 in which there was no evidence of analysis or the development of an opinion. Some writing assessments contained too many grammatical mistakes with no evidence of feedback about this. There was misunderstanding in a few instances where assessors thought the overall object of the writing task was to demonstrate that learners could write.

Task 3: Speaking and Listening

In some centres, particularly in integrated tasks, some Core Skills: Communication standards such as the use of body language were not addressed by assessors in recording documentation. In some centres, assessors did not include as evidence, a record of questions used to elicit assessment responses from learners. This made it difficult to understand some of the assessors' decisions. In a few centres, learners were asked to make

presentations that were longer than the minimum time stated in Core Skills: Communication ASPs. This is over-assessment.

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

All centres retain evidence in keeping with SQA requirements. Most centres retain evidence for longer than is necessary, particularly if this is a requirement of their other stakeholders, or for planned external verifier visits. In many centres, after the retention period has passed, learners can retrieve their evidence from the centre if they wish. In almost all centres unclaimed evidence is disposed of securely.

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

In almost all centres, external verifier reports are received by the centre's SQA co-ordinator who presents them to management. External verifier reports are shared with the wider delivery team in a meeting. Often this meeting is online. Sometimes the report is emailed to staff in advance of the meeting. The report is discussed and required actions are assigned to relevant staff. Reports are stored in centres' learning management systems. Some centres publish highlights of reports, centre-wide in newsletters, as learning directives.

Areas of good practice reported by qualification verifiers

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

♦ Staff who deliver Core Skills: Communication are well qualified, and their CPD records show clear and useful ongoing training. Centres value their staff.
♦ Staff value their learners by offering positive and individualised support.
♦ Standardisation practices are learner-centred.
♦ SQA standards were well represented in the diverse work areas in which Core Skills: Communication is delivered.
♦ Many centres assessed learners holistically through integrated, contextualised tasks.
♦ The use of technology in unit delivery, and reflections on this, have enabled a useful blended practice in many centres.
♦ Most assessors were able to work closely with learners despite physical distance to produce, reliably, authentic work.

Specific areas for development

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

♦ In many centres, good practice is not recorded and therefore it is not seen. Centres need to show more evidence of the good work they do.

- Standardisation meetings took place in almost all centres, but in some centres greater focus should be placed on identifying Core Skills: Communication standards in their work.

- In many centres, there was little or no evidence of the internal verification of learning materials. Some centres must match their learning materials to Core Skills: Communication standards more closely. This would resolve many issues of non-compliance.

- There was little evidence of written feedback between internal verifier and assessor in many centres. This is a valuable record of a centre's standardisation in practice.

- In a few centres that deliver Modern Apprenticeships, there was misunderstanding about the evidence requirements for SQA Core Skills: Communication certification.

- In a few centres there was a lack of clarity about approaches to assessment of naturally occurring evidence.

- Some centres did not present enough, necessary evidence to external verification of quality assurance around assessment. In some centres, assessment evidence lacked clarity and impact because of these omissions.

- Delivery teams in many centres must increase Core Skills: Communication standardisation activity to encourage effective decision making in the assessment process. A useful way to do this would be to consult SQA's Webinar on Workplace Assessed Core Skills: Communication

Modern Apprenticeships, Core Skills mapping and Core Skills: Communication

There has been confusion in a few centres when presenting evidence of learners' work in Modern Apprenticeships to SQA for certification in Core Skills: Communication. The evidence presented did not meet the standards for SQA's Core Skills: Communication units.

Confusion occurs in centres when they use Modern Apprenticeship mapping documents, only, to gather evidence of Core Skills: Communication for SQA certification. Modern Apprenticeship Core Skills mapping is a signposting and planning tool that identifies possibilities for Core Skills in Modern Apprenticeship frameworks. Some of this mapping satisfies Modern Apprenticeship requirements for Core Skills, but it lacks the level of fine detail and development required by SQA to ensure that Core Skills standards can be met by every learner on the variety of Modern Apprenticeships. SQA does not accept MA Core Skills Mapping as evidence for Core Skills.

External verifier visits will only accept evidence of SQA Core Skills standards as suitable evidence. Modern Apprenticeship mapping will not be accepted as evidence.

What is naturally occurring evidence?

A few centres did not present necessary evidence for verification, such as marking guidance, reading texts, and pre-verified learning materials because of restricted contexts in which evidence was produced. In these centres, naturally occurring evidence seems mistakenly to mean evidence that is captured in the workplace without planning. This is not the case. Naturally occurring evidence, and the materials that generate it, must be clearly matched to

the Core Skills: Communication standards before assessment and verification take place. If the context for assessment is not correct, then centres must change the context.

♦ Naturally occurring evidence is when learners produce evidence for a unit without having to take a formal assessment task. This is supported by a range of approaches like portfolio building, observation and witness testimony.

♦ Assessment plans should prepare for the absence of naturally occurring opportunities for evidence. Standardised, contextualised or generic assessment tasks should be created by centres so learners can finish their Core Skill: Communication units.

♦ Tasks should be delivered in the workplace to learners, or in training rooms associated with the centre. These tasks should include marking guidance.

Many centres, as part of their standardisation practices, create a Core Skill: Communication knowledge resource. Delivery teams evaluate examples of learners' work at different levels. Decisions are recorded and all are kept as a resource for ongoing guidance. The process is repeated as a regular standardisation process.

This shared knowledge resource helps to ensure that Core Skill: Communication standards are maintained in the centre's practice. This is also an excellent training resource, and it is a quality assured model for the assessment of naturally occurring evidence.