Scottish Vocational Qualifications

Qualification Verification Summary Report 2022

Workplace 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
F42J 04 SCQF level 4
F42K 04 SCQF level 5
F42L 04 SCQF level 6

Core Skills: Working with Others
F42N 04 SCQF level 4
F42P 04 SCQF level 5
F42R 04 SCQF level 6

Centres adapted well to the delivery of Workplace Core Skills Problem Solving and Working with Others during the COVID-19 pandemic, making the necessary adjustments where naturally occurring work-based evidence was not possible during lockdown periods. Simulated activities supported the underpinning work-based learning process and where possible real activities were evidenced. This resulted in a blended learning approach where centres were facing time constraints due to the disruption of the pandemic and as a result centres became more aware of the need to combine assessment processes across the programme delivery resulting in a more holistic assessment approach. Going forward, where there are no restrictions Core Skills evidence must be based on naturally occurring work-based activities and not on simulation.

Workplace Core Skills qualification verification activities took place virtually during session 2021–22 using MS Teams and will continue on this basis during session 2022–23 and beyond. The same qualification verification process is adopted through the virtual process as was used during face-to-face verification visits in the past. Virtual verification allows qualification verifiers to view all the necessary centre documentation policies and procedures and to sample all the candidate evidence prior to the virtual meeting. The MS Teams meeting is scheduled and enables the verifier to meet with staff and where possible carry out candidate interviews.

Qualification verification reports for Workplace Core Skills Problem Solving and Working with Others revealed a wide range of partnership working and Core Skills delivery across different SCQF levels 4, 5 and 6 in Modern Apprenticeship programmes: Hairdressing; IT/Telecommunications; ICT; Care; Licensing and Food Hygiene; Hospitality; Social Services Children and Young People; Management and Administration.

Almost all centres have a clear and accurate understanding of the requirements of Core Skills Problem Solving and Working with Others across the different levels but some need to evidence the 'process' through the planning, implementation and reviewing stages more rigorously. As the level increases the work-based tasks need to be sufficiently complex to enable the candidates to critically evaluate the process.

Almost all centres achieved compliance with 'high confidence' 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.

Assessors and internal verifiers need to pay specific attention to the naturally occurring tasks taking place to ensure there are enough elements in the Problem Solving and Working with Others process to allow the candidate to evidence the three-stage process of planning, carrying out and reviewing the activity.

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

2.1 Staff qualifications; occupational experience and records of CPD.
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 — 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 Qualification verifier reporting highlighted the need to have more informed qualification verifier feedback to staff within centres to inform assessment practice going forward.

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.

Most centres provided records of assessor/verifier qualifications, occupational competence and CPD activities. Staff in further education colleges tend to think that they do not need to provide this information. Qualification verifiers must be able to see the relevant certification (professional qualifications, occupational competence and CPD) for assessors and internal verifiers delivering Workplace Core Skills.

CPD evidence must not only reflect the assessment strategy requirements of the qualification but must clearly show how CPD is evidencing the Core Skill requirements, for example attendance at SQA updates, applying the feedback provided in the Core Skills QVSR report for Workplace Core Skills.

More than a few centres need to make use of the CPD toolkit, which supports assessors and internal verifiers to show how they are working to, and understanding, the current national standards of assessment/verification (L&D9D/ L&D9DI//L&D 11).

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, ongoing and end quality assurance checks (three-stage model) are in place. However, 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 Workplace qualifications, for example: MS Teams; Zoom; electronic portfolios; computers/ iPads/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 centres match candidates' development needs and prior achievements at the pre-entry stage through the application process, induction phase and informal/formal interview process. Qualification verifier reports consistently referenced how centres put the learner at the heart of the process and went 'above and beyond' to ensure candidate development needs were recorded and subsequent reviews supported the continued development of candidate needs.

There was some exemplary evidence of exceptionally detailed individual learning plans and progress reviews, which informed the learning and assessment process and the whole learner journey. This was particularly evident where there was partnership working in the delivery of Core Skills, and in most centres where external funding requirements required the systematic tracking of candidate progress towards positive destinations — for example further qualification progression or into employment.

Many centres provide one-to-one and/or group targeted support to develop learner self-confidence through individual and group work activities, which focus on problem solving strategies; co-operative team working; reviewing and reflection; leadership roles and responsibilities; and developing resilience.

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

Almost all centre systems and procedures incorporate scheduled assessor contact to review candidate progress as an integral part of qualification delivery. Scheduled contact extends into the workplace environment to include workplace assessor observations and ongoing reviews to monitor progress. This is a much more holistic process where centres have learned to combine the use of online methods with face-to-face contact.

Qualification verifier reports indicate that almost all centres have recognised procedures in place for assessors and candidates to meet on a regular basis — for example timetabled assessment contact; weekly/monthly review sessions; progress reports and witness testimonies; action plans with specific SMART objectives and timebound goals.

Category 4: Internal assessment and verification

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

Centres have robust internal assessment and verification procedures in place to ensure the standardisation of assessment. Almost all assessment decisions were consistent with Workplace 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.

SQA qualification verifiers are aware that a centre may have a schedule of verification activity across a three-year cycle and that they cannot expect that internal verification has been carried out prior to a virtual activity. 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 need to consider the impact meta skills may have on Core Skills delivery going forward.

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 MA frameworks. Realistic

and appropriate workplace tasks were then identified to evidence the Core Skill standards. In a small number of cases there was no recognition by the assessor that the task was inappropriate for the level of the Core Skill. For example, an icebreaker task may have been part of the formative assessment process as part of the induction stage to the programme delivery but is unlikely to provide the depth of evidence required to demonstrate competence in the Core Skill. Similarly, at a higher level, the tasks lacked sufficient complexity for the candidate to generate the required evidence.

Many centres provided a wide range of Core Skills evidence using a combination of assessor observations, work products, witness testimonials, photographic evidence, questioning and professional discussion. Some centres were more confident combining the delivery of one or more Core Skills, while a few set detailed tasks 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 the 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, Criterion 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.

There was consistent evidence that candidates' work was contextualised to the programme delivery and that workplace assessment of Core Skills units in Problem Solving and Working with Others reflected naturally occurring activities. Candidate evidence generated in the Hospitality and Hairdressing contexts was exemplary and really showcased the learner journey in the workplace environment where the Core Skill delivery was embedded into day to day work activities.

One centre had produced a user friendly Workplace Core Skills guide for candidates, which described each Core Skill in detail as well as the Core Skill components:

Problem Solving process: critical thinking; planning and organising; reviewing and evaluating. **Working with Others**: working co-operatively with others and reviewing the co-operative contribution.

A few centres had inappropriate assessment checklists, which did not reflect the full requirements of the Core Skills unit. More than a few did not ensure the work-based task was sufficiently complex 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.

Qualification verifier reports indicate that most centres routinely disseminate reports to staff using internal shared systems and procedures. Centres continue to retain qualification verifier 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:

♦ Good practice was noted in a Hairdressing context where the assessor had supported candidates to 'think out of the box' and apply problem solving to routine and non-routine work situations. Examples included making adaptations to salon premises in the light of COVID-19 regulations; addressing a range of complex client support needs; dealing with a burst pipe.

♦ Good practice was exemplary in Hospitality where a range of assessment methods, which included direct observation, work product, and professional discussion, really combined to showcase the kind of problems facing candidates. Examples included not registering a booking and having to adapt to organise a table for two when the restaurant was full; highlighting potential issues related to general maintenance and cleanliness (chemicals to use for different cleaning jobs; regular maintenance checks).

Specific areas for development

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

♦ Assessors and internal verifiers delivering Workplace Core Skills must provide certificates and relevant documentation to evidence professional qualifications, occupational competence and CPD activities. This is not about having a professional discussion as qualification verifiers must be able to see proof of competence to assess and internally verify in line with the requirements of the qualification (QV Report criterion 2.1).

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

♦ 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 in the workplace environment 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 Investigating; Planning and Solving and Checking and Evaluating).

♦ CPD evidence must identify how activities support the development of Core Skills and how CPD is aligned to the assessment strategy of the qualification framework.

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