National Qualifications Awards

Qualification Verification Summary Report 2023–24

Scottish Studies

Verification group number: 613

Skills for Work Courses

H3YP 43 Scottish Studies: Scotland in Focus (SCQF level 3)
H3YP 44 Scottish Studies: Scotland in Focus (SCQF level 4)
H3YP 45 Scottish Studies: Scotland in Focus (SCQF level 5)
H3YP 46 Scottish Studies: Scotland in Focus (SCQF level 6)

General comments

In session 2023–24, verification for the Scotland in Focus unit was completed in May of 2024 at a central verification event. Verification samples across centres included candidate evidence from levels 3, 4, 5 and 6. In total, nine centres submitted candidate evidence for verification, and of these, three centres had their assessment judgements accepted. Six centres had 'not accepted' judgements.

Three centres were able to demonstrate a sound understanding of the national standards for the unit. Across the selection, verifiers found that some candidates were presented at an appropriate level, however, there were instances where candidates should have been assessed at a lower level or where candidates had been judged to achieve a level when there was insufficient detail to award that level. Incorrect evidence was submitted by one centre — evidence for the Scotland in Focus unit only should be sent for verification. Centres were also reminded that aims must be related to broadening learners' knowledge of Scotland and be clearly linked to a topic which is specifically Scottish.

Most centres provided an internal verification policy, and some provided evidence of internal verification. In some cases, this was not effective in identifying issues which arose in terms of assessment judgements.

Administration of assessments

Some centres were using appropriate SQA documentation to support candidates to reach the national standard. A few centres provided documentation which included unit specification documents.

Few centres provided the verification team with the instrument of assessment used. One centre sent an instrument of assessment which was unrelated to candidate evidence. Centres are reminded that the appropriate instrument of assessment must be included, along with the marking instructions/assessor checklists. It is perfectly acceptable for centres to use the Unit Assessment Support Packs (UASPs) on SQA Secure for these; to adapt them, or to create centre-devised approaches. Centres can submit their own assessments for prior verification.

Candidates should be provided with a brief. Using a logbook which included was generally seen to be the most successful approach to assessment.

Using candidate and assessor checklists which are aligned to the assessment standards were also a helpful approach. Centres are reminded that there are different assessment standards for different levels and wording of these varies between levels too. Candidates must be assessed against the appropriate assessment standard.

Centres are advised to look at the Starter Packs on the front-facing SQA site to help with the planning and preparation of assessments.

Learning and teaching

Due to verification being a central event this year, there was no mechanism to discuss learning and teaching with centres. However, it was evident from candidate evidence that, in most centres, personalisation and choice was given to learners and that candidates' knowledge of Scotland was broadened by the course. There was evidence of integrated learning and teaching across subject areas, allowing for evidence of a deepening understanding of an aspect of Scotland.

Several centres used logbooks as an approach to learning and teaching and this was a highly effective way of ensuring candidates met all of the required assessment standards. It also allowed for supported reflection and analysis.

When delivering the award, centres are reminded that assessment standard 1.1 requires evidence of the candidate's aims. This means one aim for levels 3 and 4 and two for levels 5 and 6. Candidates should not be asked for more than the required aims. A helpful approach is to ask candidates to frame their aims like a learning intention or thesis statement. Candidates at level 3 can agree an aim with their assessor; at level 4 it can be chosen from a list; for levels 5 and 6, two aims which are connected are required. Aims must clearly relate to what candidates intend to learn about — something specifically Scottish.

Assessment standard 1.2 is related to the activity chosen to achieve the candidates' aim(s). At level 3, candidates agree on an activity, in discussion with the assessor. At level 4, candidates choose an activity and at levels 5 and 6, candidates independently identify their activity. Centres should ensure that a degree of choice is given to candidates to allow them to achieve this assessment standard. Increasingly, evidence is a report or essay, but more creative ways can be used to demonstrate achievement.

For assessment standard 1.3, candidates are required to give information about the sources and the resources they plan to use to complete their activity. At level 3, candidates are asked to agree to the specific information and resources they will use. At level 4, candidates choose these from a selection given by the centre and, at levels 5 and 6, candidates are expected to identify these for themselves. To clarify, sources include texts, videos, interviews, newspapers, etc, and could be referenced like a bibliography; resources include equipment needed, such as stationery, ICT equipment, etc.

Centres are also reminded that, for assessment standard 2.1, candidates at level 5 and level 6 are required to analyse what they have learned, and that this analysis must be 'in depth' for level 6.

Overall assessment

Assessment judgements were not in line with the national standard in most centres sampled this year.

Where candidate and assessor checklists were used, centres were more effective in their assessment judgements. These are also effective ways of providing marking instructions for the verification process.

Verification

Evidence of internal verification was in place in most centres, though in some cases this process was unsuccessful. Some centres did not provide evidence of internal verification and were advised that this should be a development target. Centres are reminded that details of internal verification processes are required as part of the national verification process. Support for this is available at: ww.sqa.org.uk/IVtoolkit.

Where effective evidence of internal verification was provided, the external verification (EV) team saw examples of discussion of the assessment standards, candidate evidence, and of the whole verification process. Some centres included the comments of internal verifiers on candidate evidence, minutes of moderation meetings and the centre's internal verification policy.

Evidence requirements were understood by many centres. Centres using candidate and assessor checklists were able to effectively document assessment decisions and ensure all assessment standards were being met. Comments on assessor checklists were particularly helpful to verifiers. While these are not mandatory, they significantly add to our understanding of the centre's process for assessing candidate evidence.

Centres are advised to revisit the UASPs and Understanding Standards materials on SQA Secure.

Areas of good practice reported on during

The use of logbooks was observed in some centres. This approach was supportive to candidate success and helped ensure all assessment standards were covered.

Centres using published, or amended, candidate and assessor checklists were able to clearly evidence candidate attainment. Some centres provided detailed comments on assessor checklists which showed how and where candidates had (or had not)

met the assessment standards. This is a helpful method of showing candidate achievement.

In most centres, candidates had a wide choice for their Scotland in Focus units and had clearly made use of the personalisation and choice the course allows. It was evident, in most cases, that the candidates had independently chosen aims related to their own interests, but which also broadened their knowledge of Scotland. Candidate engagement in the award was evident through the range of choices.

Some centres had a clear internal quality assurance policy, and procedures in place showed a focused and organised approach to internal assessment and internal verification. In these centres, annotated candidate evidence with comments from internal moderation processes was provided. Feedback from internal assessors, internal and external verifiers was included with candidate evidence, exemplifying the effectiveness of the IV system. Some centres provided records and minutes of meetings which formed the quality assurance process, showing the planning process undertaken by the centre and actions taken for each candidate.

Specific areas for improvement reported during session 2023–24:

Centres should take some time to engage with candidate evidence and commentaries on the SQA Secure site for Scottish Studies to support assessment judgements for levels 3, 4 and 5, particularly in relation to the level of detail required and the way that analysis/evaluation is used at these levels. The 2019 examples are likely to be the most useful. Centres should also use the UASPs for each level to help them prepare for delivering the award.

Centres who received a 'not accepted' decision were advised to ensure that candidate evidence included sufficient detail for the level of presentation. Levels of presentation can be characterised as follows:

♦ level 3: 'basic'
♦ level 4: 'in some detail'
♦ level 5: 'in detail'
♦ level 6: 'in depth' and 'in detail'

Centres must ensure they understand what constitutes a good aim for the Scotland in Focus unit. There are examples with commentary available on the Understanding Standards site which would help with this. Some centres were advised to ensure candidates had clearly focused aims which allowed them to demonstrate their broadening knowledge of Scotland. Again, some centres are submitting candidate evidence where candidates have given more than one aim (for levels 3 and 4) or more than two for levels 5 and 6. This disadvantages candidates as they are then unable to provide sufficient detail because, by attempting to cover too many aims, none of the aims are achieved in sufficient depth.

There continued to be fewer occasions where outdoor learning, partnership working, or creative evidence was being utilised. It is hoped that centres will be able to return to those more activity-based and/or creative approaches. Candidates should be encouraged to choose or identify activities that match their individual skills. While written reports are entirely acceptable, other forms of communication, for example craft, artwork, music, an interview, a group debate, a short film or a drama production, are also valid and may allow candidates to demonstrate their strengths in a more effective way. This year, again, activities were predominantly written responses in a report format, with some posters and some presentations. It should be noted that posters do limit the amount of information that a candidate can include which may have an impact on the detail of their work. This can also be the case for a PowerPoint submitted.

Candidates should be encouraged to ensure that specific sources are clearly identified either in a logbook or in a detailed bibliography. Evaluation of sources should also be encouraged at all levels. Full URL details should be provided for websites and generalisations such as: 'Google', 'Wikipedia' and 'the BBC' should be avoided as these are not specific enough. Use of a variety of types of specific sources is preferred; candidates could be encouraged to use books, TV documentaries, interviews and surveys, as well as internet sources (search engines should not be given as sources — specific websites or web pages should be referenced).

Centres must ensure that appropriate levels of support are given to candidates at different levels. Candidates being assessed at level 3 are allowed to be given directive support to agree to an aim and choices of sources. For level 4, candidates can be given support/advice, including choosing from a selection of aims/sources provided by a teacher. For levels 5 and 6, candidates must not be given directive support, but instead should demonstrate independence and be provided with minimal support.

Centres must ensure that candidates have not been over reliant upon source material, especially when completing research online. Lifting directly from sources is not an appropriate method of communicating what they have learned, and candidates cannot achieve assessment standard 2.2 (communicating what they have learned clearly and in an appropriate way). Centres must ensure that candidates have not 'lifted' content from their sources without re-interpretation, rephrasing or recasting this information.

When centres are submitting evidence for candidates who have delivered a talk/PowerPoint presentation, they must ensure that candidate evidence demonstrates that all aims have been fully achieved. This will usually mean the candidate will need to include their research notes and/or full, detailed, script or assessors will have provided detailed comments about the content of the presentation. The most helpful approach is to have a transcript of the presentation. An example of this approach is available on SQA Secure. It is important to evidence what the candidate has said in order to allow the verifier to determine the appropriate level of detail and relevance to the aims.

Centres should ensure that candidates at levels 5 and 6 undertake analysis of their topic. At level 6, candidates must also analyse their process for completing their activity. This must be in depth analysis, done in detail.

Centres should ensure that there is an effective system for the internal verification of candidate evidence. Evidence of these discussions should be retained (notes on candidates' work; minutes of meetings, etc) along with the instrument of assessment and marking schemes used. Centre staff are reminded that all centres offering SQA qualifications must have an effective internal quality assurance system in place which ensures that all candidates are assessed accurately, fairly, and consistently to national standards. Centres can access support with this by using the Internal Verification Toolkit at: www.sqa.org.uk/IVtoolkit.

Centres are reminded that it is possible to request a development visit from the SQA verification team to support in the delivery of the Scotland in Focus unit.