



**Skills for Work**

**Qualification Verification Summary Report 2023–24**

# **Rural Skills**

**Verification group number: 436**

## **General comments**

A total of ten external verification visits were carried out during 2023–24. All visits recorded an ‘Accepted’ decision. The return to face-to-face verification was much appreciated by the SQA verification team and participating centres. There was some overall variation between centres regarding the final level of achievement reached. A small number of centres only reached the minimum course requirements, meanwhile a majority exceeded this, without compromising the ability of less able candidates to achieve.

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

The course is now well established throughout participating centres. The unit specifications remain current and broadly fit for purpose. At some point it would seem to be prudent to review course arrangements to ensure continuing currency / relevance, particularly in terms of the climate emergency. Some minor revisions, while appropriate, are perhaps not absolutely essential at this time.

## **Evidence requirements**

The evidence presented by each of the participating centres met, and mostly exceeded, the minimum requirements of the award.

## **Administration of assessments**

Assessments were administered by centres wholly in accordance with SQA policies and procedures.

## **Learning and teaching**

Learning and teaching remains the preserve of participating centres. Minimum requirements: demonstrators should be vocationally competent in their subject area; assessors should be qualified in assessment and support demonstrators during the assessment process; internal verifiers are expected to be qualified in the assessment process, eg GTCS registered or equivalent.

## **Overall assessment**

There is currently no overarching assessment for this course. All assessment is carried out internally and verified externally by SQA.

## Verification

Traditionally, internal verification has been our most problematic area. Centres now generally understand SQA policies and procedures. Year on year, issues regarding internal verification of SfW courses have reduced. This academic year, only a single issue was raised in this regard.

## Areas of good practice reported on during session 2023–24

Examples of good practice included:

- ◆ The centre has responded well to changing circumstances, particularly the current increase in candidate numbers (15), and there being insufficient resource to continue with the horticultural units. Course delivery has been adapted to make the most effective use of the available resources, both physical and teaching. In the animal handling and husbandry units, dogs were made available by staff, candidates and the public. This lends a community feel to qualification delivery and is much to be commended.
- ◆ A large, dedicated garden within centre grounds allowed candidates to work within the school estate without recourse to external trips to carry out vocational activities.
- ◆ A dedicated and multi-experienced course delivery team.
- ◆ A willingness to allow candidates to go beyond the basic requirements of the qualification without compromising the ability of the less gifted to achieve.
- ◆ The joint partnership working with a local FE college and an external horticulture specialist provides an excellent balance of skills for the effective delivery and assessment of this award.
- ◆ The candidate group project extension work (to design/plan and build a planter) was a very effective vehicle to consolidate learning and practical skills.
- ◆ The very effective use of an internal verifier from a local school to support both the assessment process and make unit delivery suggestions has allowed the identification of some alterations to the assessment timings and supported staff in their assessment approaches.
- ◆ The centre has developed excellent links with other organisations and individuals and uses these to the advantage of the candidates. This includes the Royal Horticultural Society who, in addition to CPD for staff, also deliver sessions to the candidates 4–6 times per year.
- ◆ The local FE college has provided land for tree planting; a croft has been used for fence construction and the candidates are able to work on the local community farm. The use of specialists helps support the assessor and add to their own CPD.
- ◆ The evidence produced for J161 74 Estate Maintenance was acceptable. It was well laid out and easy to follow. The photographs were plentiful and of a good quality.

- ◆ The centre has very good facilities for the delivery of the award with large areas of grass, fencing, paths and open ground for work.

## **Specific areas for improvement reported during session 2023–24**

Areas for improvement included:

- ◆ The assessor observation checklists would benefit from dates on individual parts of the task. All scribed work should be dated and initialled by the scribe.
- ◆ Due to several staffing changes the centre does need to take time to review and collate the candidate evidence emerging from the practical tasks which have been undertaken and plan the practical tasks yet to be completed.
- ◆ The centre does need to plan the completion of several units that have a high practical or seasonal delivery element.
- ◆ The centre should continue to develop and work with external organisations and individuals for the benefit of the candidates. The use of specialists working in these areas also helps support the assessor and adds to their own CPD.
- ◆ The first employability review would benefit from being done earlier in the programme allowing for a more even spacing of the three reviews.
- ◆ Internal verification should be formally recorded.
- ◆ The centre is encouraged to facilitate at least two candidate industry visits and job role guest speakers, to support the delivery and understanding for the unit: Land-based Industries: An Introduction.
- ◆ The centre is encouraged to focus in more detail on one or two crops within the unit Crop Production: An Introduction.
- ◆ The centre should enable the specialist Horticulture Assessor to countersign completed candidate assessment evidence, as appropriate.
- ◆ The revised assessor observation checklists would benefit from dates on individual parts of the task (which may be completed over an extended period of time).
- ◆ The school were reminded that minor changes to assessment criteria were fine provided tasks of equal and related challenge were substituted. In the event of major changes, these should be submitted to SQA for prior verification.
- ◆ The centre must introduce and implement an effective IV process to review this award. The use of an internal verifier from a local school with current experience of delivering the Skills for Work Rural Skills award was recommended.
- ◆ The centre should develop a more structured approach to the delivery and assessment of the two livestock units: Animal Husbandry: An Introduction and Animal Handling: An Introduction. This should draw on the ‘partners’ expertise and support, to enable the unit assessment requirements to be met for the chosen animal species.
- ◆ The centre should improve the collation and on-going recording of assessments evidence, to support more effective feedback and monitoring of candidates’ progress. This should include the timely marking of all assessment evidence.

- ◆ The centre may wish to consider requesting an award 'development visit' from SQA, if timescales permit.
- ◆ It was a matter of some regret that the centre will not deliver the qualification 2024–25 due to lack of uptake by potential candidates.
- ◆ Units J162 74 Land-based Industries: An Introduction and J163 74 Employability Skills for Land-based Industries can be completed at any time, but units J166 74 Crop Production and J167 74 Soft Landscaping have a seasonal element and may not be able to be completed for a while. As this is now the second verification visit with no evidence for the practical horticulture units, the centre should have the work externally verified before submitting results for these units.