



Supporting the delivery, assessment and verification of SQA units, session 2021–22:

Information and guidance for China centres

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Scope

This document applies to the following group awards:

- ◆ Higher National Diplomas (including graded units)
- ◆ Advanced Diplomas (including graded units)

Context

SQA would like to acknowledge the collaboration and support of centres in working together to develop alternative assessment arrangements for learners during the unprecedented circumstances faced in sessions 2019–20 and 2020–21.

We recognise that the learning environment and social landscape remains challenging, with operating models in centres involving more remote and blended learning approaches, and less opportunity for face-to-face delivery and assessment. Delivering centres are encouraged to continue to consider and plan more innovative approaches to assessment, and to seek opportunities to combine assessment where there is commonality or duplication across units of study. Where possible, we will continue to offer flexibility around conditions of assessment, making delivery more accessible for all.

This guidance applies for candidates who will require certification by end of August 2022 for SQA Advanced Diplomas or December 2021 for Higher National Diplomas, and will apply to units from across the SQA portfolio. However, there may be some subject-specific or unit-type restrictions that will restrict the flexibility that can be offered (eg health and safety requirements, license to practice, sector skills council requirements). Where this is the case, we will provide clear additional guidance.

Core principles

Three core principles continue to be at the heart of all decision making for SQA qualifications. These are:

- ◆ fairness to all learners
- ◆ safe and secure certification of qualifications, while following the latest public health advice
- ◆ maintaining the integrity and credibility of the qualification system, ensuring that standards are maintained over time, in the interests of learners

In support of this, for all centres, in whatever circumstances, the first duty is to deliver high-quality learning and teaching, and to assess candidates in a way that is valid, reliable, practical, equitable and fair. This guidance seeks to support course teams in delivering this key duty in ways which uphold the integrity of qualifications, without unnecessary barriers, while acknowledging the need to be flexible and responsive to conditions which remain unpredictable.

The decision-making process

This decision-making process applies to group awards and graded units. Where learners can produce sufficient evidence using the traditional unitised assessment model, assessment should continue as normal and as per unit specifications. Internal verification and results processing should continue as normal.

If it is not considered possible to progress with assessment using the unitised approach in line with unit specification requirements, the course team should consider the guidance and approaches that follow.

Guidance

This guidance is provided to support the most effective ways for candidates to generate evidence of competence and for assessors to judge that evidence against unit standards. This may involve alternative approaches where the usual approaches are not considered accessible or suitable. Please note that it will be necessary to generate evidence that demonstrates that all outcomes of all units have been met.

SQA will support centres as follows:

- ◆ guidance and practical support on how to make the most of opportunities for combined assessment
- ◆ flexibility to adapt the assessment requirements, wherever possible
- ◆ modification of external verification activity (visiting and virtual) to reflect the combined assessment model.

Course mapping

The starting point for all course teams will be to undertake (or re-visit) a mapping exercise to collectively review outcomes and all of the associated assessment activities across all the units of study. This will be key to identifying:

- ◆ potentially compatible outcomes and evidence requirements and opportunities to combine assessment
- ◆ any potential requirement to adjust or reduce the evidence required
- ◆ any considerations around established assessment requirements

Valuable information can often be found in group award specifications.

Once the mapping exercise has been undertaken, course teams may wish to use the Assessment Planning Tool (Appendix 1). This has been designed to support the course team in considering the options available to them and the processes to follow.

While the course team may carry out this process wholly at centre level, we encourage centres to exploit opportunities for collaborative working and sharing of practice through

established subject networks or by exploring opportunities to create new ones. We will support these by making external verifiers and qualification managers or other staff members available wherever possible.

Quality teams within centres can help identify opportunities for cross-sector collaboration. Equally, quality teams should be kept informed of any collaborative activities that a course team may initiate or join.

You must ensure that:

- ◆ robust internal quality assurance processes are in place to support, advise and guide course teams.
- ◆ appropriate protocols are followed to maintain the standards, integrity and credibility of qualifications.

SQA requires that centres can demonstrate that all assessors and internal verifiers have a common understanding of the standards required, and that they can provide evidence of how they have checked the assessment instruments for validity (currency and fitness for purpose).

The result should be a carefully considered and cohesive assessment plan that is agreed and supported by the whole course team and endorsed by the centre.

As centres or clusters develop new or modified assessment approaches, we will highlight good practice examples through our website subject pages, and will signpost any newly developed instruments of assessment, which will be published on our secure site. You can request access to these materials from your SQA co-ordinator or quality team (which is the established process).

Combining assessment

In SQA qualifications, it is not necessary to assess each outcome separately. We encourage a combined approach that allows evidence to be gathered for a range of outcomes or evidence requirements within a unit or across more than one unit. This can:

- ◆ be more meaningful for learners
- ◆ take less time
- ◆ give assurance of overall competence
- ◆ avoid over-assessment and improve motivation
- ◆ facilitate flexible approaches to verification
- ◆ benefit learning

Combined assessment can arise from identifying similar assessment requirements within and across units, removing duplication. For example, it may be possible to identify an overarching task that allows evidence for a range of outcomes within or across more than one unit to be gathered by a single coherent activity.

In many of the HND and Advanced Diploma frameworks, there are opportunities to generate evidence through a single task that may satisfy different units. For example, producing a newsletter could provide some evidence to meet the requirements of an IT Applications Software unit and a Communication unit.

- ◆ When you are developing an assessment across units, do ensure that the content of the units is sufficiently related to make the assessment coherent and meaningful to learners.
- ◆ Some assessment methods lend themselves more easily to combining outcomes and units than others. Teams are therefore advised to select the more obvious opportunities to combine and those which will make the biggest impact in terms of reducing the burden of assessment. Trying to combine more obscure evidence requirements may, in fact, be counterproductive and introduce unnecessary barriers.
- ◆ When combining assessments, take care to ensure that the assessment task is of the same level of demand for the candidate as would be required by the original individual assessment requirement.

Course teams should use their own experience, expertise and qualification/subject knowledge to identify the most obvious opportunities to combine, avoiding at all times any risk to the standard of the qualification. You should seek further expert guidance and support where there is any doubt.

The activities of a combined assessment should be included in an assessment plan and cross-referenced back to the outcomes (the course team's mapping). This will help to ensure that all outcomes of all the units have been achieved.

Where a combined assessment approach is developed, assessors must also consider how to deal with any need for candidate remediation and re-assessment. This should be in line with the centre's policy for remediation and re-assessment.

Flexibility to adapt the assessment requirements

Alongside combined assessment, SQA will also offer centres the flexibility to adapt assessment requirements to reduce reliance on face-to-face assessment. We will identify (and communicate) specific qualifications or subject areas where health and safety, licence to practice or other particular limitations mean that it is not possible to offer flexibility.

For all other qualifications, you should use professional judgement in collaboration with the wider course team and internal verifiers to agree additional and alternative opportunities for candidates to demonstrate their competence, knowledge and understanding through a range of reasonable and practicable alternative activities. Some examples are:

- ◆ **Remote testing** (this could be paper based, app based, online, audio, video). This should assess skills, knowledge and understanding and should include sufficient challenge and application to demonstrate the appropriate level of attainment.
- ◆ **Professional discussion**. This would be recording a professional discussion between a learner and an assessor. The discussion would focus on, and enhance, evidence already provided or demonstrated by the learner — including real work activities, practical tasks, a case study, project, portfolio or some other form of assessment.

- ◆ **Practical assessment.** In some circumstances, evidence may be assessed using remote assessment (video, photographic, portfolio, witness testimony), alongside work already demonstrated and assessed.

Where assessment requirements are adapted, you should consider any additional action required, on a risk-assessed basis, to confirm the authenticity of the candidate's work. You must ensure that the evidence on which the assessment decision is made belongs solely to the candidate being assessed — assessors are only able to make accurate assessment decisions if this is the case.

It is important that the security of existing secure closed-book assessment instruments is not compromised. You should adapt assessment requirements for centre-devised instruments of assessment in the first instance — you should not do so for SQA secure material without prior permission from SQA.

If you intend adapting a centre-devised instrument of assessment that has previously been submitted to SQA for prior verification, and is shared on the secure site, you must notify SQA by email: qvprior@sqa.org.uk.

The distribution and use of secure assessment materials will be monitored by SQA. If the security of any national instrument of assessment is compromised, this must be reported to SQA via your SQA co-ordinator immediately.

Approaches to external verification

Centres can request support in the early stages of the development of combined assessment approaches, and we will encourage centres to engage in developmental activity (ideally on a sector or cluster basis).

Discussion around the course mapping and agreed approaches to assessment relative to outcomes, evidence and assessment requirements will be an important element of any visiting or virtual verification activity.

During session 2020–21, we introduced virtual verification. The new virtual verification model will remain the SQA default during session 2021–22. Virtual verification will require more collaboration between SQA, external verifiers and centres during planning for visiting verification. This will help determine whether group award verification is appropriate and, if so, the requirements for verification activity.

Graded units

To support centres and learners, the requirement to complete the unit assessment within the graded unit element of the HND or Advanced Diploma has been removed. Instead centres can choose to gather evidence across mandatory units to come to a grading decision for the graded unit.

If the centre or course team has chosen to, or is required to, assess learners using normal approaches (such as graded unit projects or examinations), this should go ahead as planned.

In line with SQA communication, the centre or course team can choose not to progress with a traditional assessment approach to graded unit this session. If they decide to concentrate on learning, teaching and assessment in the component and mandatory units of the award, learners should be assessed using the SQA guidance for graded units above.

It is important that learners are not disadvantaged because the centre and/or course team has decided not to progress the established assessment approach for graded units in session 2021–22.

External verification

External verification activity will be undertaken, with selections for SQA Advanced qualifications being released to centres from January 2022 onwards.

External verification activity planning will commence in December 2021, with generic verification activity taking place in March 2022. External verification activity will take place from March to June 2022.

QA activity will remain on a virtual platform, with group award verification taking place for SQA Advanced qualifications, where logistically possible. Unit verification will take place if group award is not possible.

It is essential that you retain evidence of your assessment judgements, as you may be asked for this during external verification activity.

Academic appeals

The centre's established academic appeals process should be followed for any learner who feels that the assessment outcome does not accurately reflect their achievement.

Additional sources of information

SQA Guide to Assessment

The Qualification Verification Process Guidance for Centres

Prior verification page on our website — this will provide guidance on all three options (this link won't change): <https://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/74665.html>

Secure site

Appendix 1: Assessment Planning Tool

