



SQA Advanced Diploma (China)
Qualification Verification Summary Report 2021
English and Communication

Verification group number: 1

Introduction

Qualification verification for academic session 2020–21 was carried out by group award using Microsoft Teams for virtual meetings between centre staff and SQA’s external verifiers. Three verification group 1 units were externally verified by a team of five external verifiers. Being able to participate in discussions was broadly welcomed by all.

External verifiers felt that there was an overall improvement in standards across all units. All centres were fully engaged with the external verification process, and most were eager to consider recommendations to improve their practice.

This report presents the key findings from the 2020–21 session, identifies good practice and suggests areas where centres should aim to make improvements. Several issues raised here had also been raised in previous reports. This emphasises the need to include review of this QVSR as an important part of staff CPD, and also to emphasise the importance of paying attention to external verifier recommendations.

There were 30 verification events. Units verified (and occurrences) were as follows:

HR1C 46 Workplace Communication in English (24 occurrences)
HP75 47 Communication: Business Communication (2 occurrences)
J1NB 47 Research Skills (5 occurrences)

The focus for qualification verification was on four criteria: 2.1, 4.2, 4.3 and 4.4. The remaining criteria (2.4, 3.2, 3.3, 4.4, 4.7 and 4.9) were covered by generic reporting.

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.

In most centres, assessors and internal verifiers have actively engaged in CPD throughout 2020–21 and recorded this in a meaningful and reflective way. There was ample evidence that staff were actively updating their knowledge of SQA processes and many staff had undertaken CPD to develop their teaching methodologies.

In some centres, CPD records were brief, and staff sometimes had repetitive entries, or records which were identical to their colleagues. Some staff had no record of any activity which updated their specialist subject knowledge. When discussed at meetings, it sometimes became clear that staff were regularly doing this as part of their role, but they neglected to include it in their CPD logs. In order to demonstrate that they remain competent to assess and verify in line with the requirements of the qualifications, staff should show that they are keeping their specialist subject knowledge current. This could be through attendance at internal and external events, academic reading, participating in online courses, reviewing new subject material or improving their own English language skills.

Category 4: Internal assessment and verification

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

Overall, there has been an improvement in the quality of internal verification documentation. Most centres kept detailed and meaningful internal verification records using standardised templates which documented key points of discussions and decisions made. These helped to ensure ongoing consistency. They also aid in building the confidence of staff as they exercise professional judgement in their decision-making.

A small number of centres only kept brief and repetitive records. Comments were cut and pasted from meeting to meeting. Merely listing headings of items discussed at meetings does not contribute to effective internal verification and standardisation.

Within the internal verification documentation, some sampling records were detailed and informative. In one centre, the assessor made it clear to the internal verifier which candidates were considered borderline to prompt the verifier to look more closely at those particular candidates in the sampling, thus generating discussion and ultimately developing more confident professional judgement and decision-making.

Almost all centres provided ample evidence of standardisation. In one centre, both the assessor and internal verifier adopted a double-marking strategy to ensure standardisation. They exchanged 15 selected candidate scripts to check each other's marking decisions and feedback comments against marking standards.

Many centres presented detailed and reflective internal verification reports which analysed unit results and all aspects of candidates' performance including their strengths and weaknesses relating to evidence requirements. These Assessment Summary Reports (sometimes called Subject Review or Post Delivery Assessment Summary or Course Quality Review Report) contained actions to be carried forward to the following year. These are very useful documents and will almost certainly contribute to ongoing quality improvements within these centres. An Assessment Summary Report template is available in the SQA centre toolkit.

In some centres, recommendations made in previous QV reports had not been addressed. This often led to mistakes from the previous year being repeated. Effective internal verification records showed where recommendations had been discussed and subsequently implemented, or they gave reasons for rejecting them.

For some verification events there were issues with the way evidence had been uploaded into folders according to SQA criterion. Sometimes the same evidence was repeated in every folder. Occasionally evidence for several criteria was presented in a single file making it very difficult to navigate. Sometimes large volumes of unnecessary teaching material or learner support materials were included. In order to ensure effective external verification, it is important that centre staff understand what is needed for each criterion and only upload the evidence required to the correct place.

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

*HR1C 46 Workplace Communication in English and
HP75 47 Communication: Business Communication*

Most centres presented centre-devised marking schemes for all outcomes which had been developed using the evidence requirements and expanded by reference to the assessment support packs to include other essential requirements such as word counts, timings for speaking and listening, and need for learners to use their own words etc. In these centres, assessment decisions were consistently applied. In a small number of centres, marking schemes for outcomes 2 and 3 were just reiterations of evidence requirements. A few contained some inconsistencies with evidence requirements. Brief or inaccurate marking schemes do not help assessors and verifiers to ensure that standards are being met and could put centres at risk of non-compliance.

In a small number of centres, mistakes are still being made with conditions of assessment for outcome 1. Some centres are only allowing candidates to use dictionaries. It is important to note that this is an open-book assessment therefore candidates may refer to notes as well as dictionaries during the assessment. Assessors may wish to offer guidance to candidates on the type of notes that may be useful to them and how they can use them effectively in an assessment environment.

A very small number of centres made mistakes with outcome 1 re-assessment, allowing candidates to use option A questions for assessment, followed by option B for re-assessment. Where responses are not accurate or there is a clear lack of understanding, candidates must undertake a new re-assessment activity.

J1NB 47 Research Skills

For the selected verification events, Research Skills was assessed as a standalone unit in four centres. It was integrated with the graded unit on one occasion. Assessment instruments were valid and used correctly in all cases.

However, the approach to re-assessment should be clarified in some centres as it has the potential to be unfair to weaker candidates. This particular unit focuses on the development and refinement of research skills so candidates should always be allowed to re-work their original research topic, except in cases where malpractice is proven. If candidates fail to achieve the unit, they should be allowed to further re-work the same investigation topic, after additional guidance. Expecting a failed candidate to start again with a brand-new investigation would be unfair and is unnecessary.

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

In general, almost all centres are making good progress with accurately and consistently judging candidates' work. The following unit and outcome specific comments highlight important issues.

*HR1C 46 Workplace Communication in English and
HP75 47 Communication: Business Communication*

Outcome 1

Across all centres, most learners fail outcome 1 at the first attempt. Some centres have begun analysing the reasons for this and are taking steps to improve, such as additional formative work prior to assessment. All centres would benefit from ongoing analysis of the specific reasons for this and taking appropriate steps to reduce the amount of re-work/re-do and re-assessment.

A few centres did not fully adhere to evidence requirements for the analysis section of outcome 1. They awarded credit incorrectly when candidates had failed to use their own words when answering the analysis questions, resulting in required actions and candidates having to re-take assessments.

Outcome 2

There is a marked improvement in candidates adhering to word counts which has led to a noticeable improvement in standards.

In some cases, issues with assessment judgements for outcome 2 related to incorrect understanding of what is accepted as consistently accurate spelling punctuation and grammar. This is improving in almost all centres.

A small number of assessors need to more strictly apply evidence requirements relating to effective structure, appropriate format and effectiveness of communication. Some centres awarded credit incorrectly to candidates who did not understand structure and did not organise information correctly into findings, conclusions and recommendations. This resulted in some required actions and candidates being asked to undertake re-assessment.

Outcome 3

While there was some excellent practice in the presentation of evidence for outcome 3, some centres fell short of minimum requirements. In order to facilitate external verification of outcome 3, centres must upload video evidence of a sample of candidates' oral communication performances. Having access to video evidence and the accompanying assessment checklists is the only effective way that assessment decisions relating to oral communication skills can be verified and confirmed as accurately and consistently judged against SQA requirements.

Most centres did include video samples. Some centres experienced technical difficulties and were unable to upload video evidence. Advice should be sought from SQA on how to do this successfully.

Where videos were included, it was sometimes difficult to match the candidates in the samples to their respective observation checklists. Observation checklists were sometimes brief and repetitive.

Sometimes candidates demonstrated weaknesses in their non-verbal communication such as lack of eye contact or not demonstrating engagement when someone else was speaking. While most assessors addressed this, in a small number of cases it was overlooked.

In one centre, candidates participating in the Business Communication formal meeting, chose to dress in business attire to help to set the tone and create a sense of occasion for their assessment. In another centre, the assessor used video evidence to help candidates who had not been successful in their first attempt to develop their non-verbal communication skills prior to re-assessment. This assessor also selected the candidate groups to ensure the best dynamic for motivation and interaction between candidates.

J1NB 47Research Skills

Outcome 1

Assessment judgements were correct in all instances. Candidate feedback was almost always of good quality, starting from outcome 1 and continuing throughout the unit.

Outcome 2

A small number of candidates are still attempting to be overly ambitious in the scope of their primary source research. In one centre, candidates aimed for 200 respondents. This should be advised against. 20 to 40 respondents answering no more than 10 questions is adequate.

Outcome 3

There were noticeable improvements in referencing skills in all centres. In a small number of cases, learners inserted phrases taken directly from other sources into their reports without using quotations. It is important that learners understand the difference between quotation and citation. Exact lifts of phrases require quotation marks plus citation. Otherwise, learners should paraphrase, using their own words, and then include the citation.

Areas of good practice reported by qualification verifiers

The following good practice was reported during session 2020–21:

- ◆ Reflection and action focused target-setting in relation to CPD undertaken
- ◆ Ensuring that sampling includes some focus on borderline candidates to prompt discussion and build confidence
- ◆ Adoption of a double-marking strategy to ensure standardisation
- ◆ Reflective Assessment Summary Reports contributing to ongoing quality improvements
- ◆ Consideration of how EV recommendations can contribute to quality improvements
- ◆ Detailed centre devised marking schemes for all outcomes ensuring consistency
- ◆ Encouraging candidates to work to word counts to improve quality of written work
- ◆ Pro-actively planning outcome 3 Workplace Communication assessment for the best possible group dynamic and non-verbal communication

Specific areas for development

The following areas for development were reported during session 2020–21:

General areas for development

- ◆ Inclusion of some subject-specific CPD each year to ensure knowledge and skills remain up-to-date
- ◆ Creating a culture of reflection and analysis by assessors and verifiers to better understand candidates' performance
- ◆ Improved understanding of evidence required for each qualification verification criterion

Areas for development specific to Workplace Communication in English and Communication: Business Communication

- ◆ Ensuring correct understanding of open-book assessment conditions
- ◆ Formative work to better prepare candidates for outcome 1 assessment
- ◆ Ensure learners understand link between findings, conclusions and recommendations in outcome 2 assessment
- ◆ Provision of a range of robust evidence for effective verification of outcome 3 assessment decisions

Areas for development specific to Research Skills

- ◆ Fairer re-assessment strategy for candidates who fail at their first attempt.