SQA Advanced Qualifications (China)

Qualification Verification Summary Report 2022

English and Communication

Verification group number: 1

Introduction

During the 2021–22 academic session, 30 virtual qualification verification events took place in Chinese centres using MS Teams. The focus this year was mainly on Research Skills, with some sampling of Workplace Communication in English and more limited sampling of Communication: Business Communication.

Overall, there have been significant improvements in centres' outcome ratings. Almost all achieved 'high confidence' after the first verification event.

This report addresses the key findings based on qualification verification criteria. Examples of good practice are presented and areas for development are suggested for consideration.

The units covered by this report are:

HR0Y 47/J1NB 47   Research Skills (19 events)
HR1C 46   Workplace Communication in English (10 events)
HP75 47   Communication: Business Communication (1 event)

Assessors and internal verifiers using this report should add it to your staff records as subject-specific CPD (continuing professional development).

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.

All centres provided ample evidence of staff competence to assess and internally verify verification group 1 qualifications. In most centres extensive and current CPD records were provided, showing participation in a range of virtual SQA professional events in China. This included attendance at a series of SQA webinars on Communication and Research Skills, and formal review of the 2021 SQA qualification verification summary report.

A few centres provided excellent CPD records which included a section for reflection with an explanation of how staff had benefited from participation in training events.

However, some centres had important gaps in their records. One centre submitted a group CPD record, identical for all staff which lacked any real meaning. At other centres, some staff failed to include any subject-specific CPD, which is essential to demonstrate ongoing competence.

Category 4: Internal assessment and verification

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

In almost all centres, internal verification documentation was carefully organised and presented in folders labelled according to the correct verification criterion. Just one centre uploaded evidence incorrectly making it difficult to ascertain whether they were compliant.

All centres demonstrated that the internal verification (IV) process was being effectively implemented. All centres signposted their internal verification handbook and most had ample documentation to show that processes were being followed effectively.

Unfortunately, some centres continued to ignore straightforward recommendations given by external verifiers in qualification verification (QV) reports. Recommendations are not mandatory, but they are included to help centres to improve assessment and/or verification practices and to ensure future compliance. They should therefore be considered carefully.

The quality of minutes of IV meetings has improved since the 2020–21 report, with many centres using their minutes to record evidence of constructive dialogue and decision making.

Some centres still have scope for improvement in the quality of minutes of IV meetings. In some cases, records of meetings were very brief, sometimes just a list of headings. It is difficult to see how such brief documents can be useful to the SQA co-ordinator, to managers, external verifiers or even to other teachers. The lack of SMART actions limits their value as they contribute little to future quality improvement. Minutes of meetings should be detailed and meaningful. They should accurately reflect decisions and actions relating to the areas for discussion rather than simply listing what was discussed.

Some centres included excellent analytical and evaluative post-delivery review reports – sometimes referred to as assessment summary reports. They provided a very helpful overview of the course and student progress, along with clear suggestions. The best of these were action focused and will most certainly help centres to make improvements to teaching, assessment and verification for the next academic session.

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

J1NB 47/HR0Y 47 Research Skills

All centres verified in this session made good use of the SQA ASPs. Almost all used the SQA assessment checklists to record achievement accurately. A few centres adapted the checklists unnecessarily, or made their own, resulting in changes of emphasis and introducing errors which could have led to under assessment. It is important to ensure checklists reflect the exact evidence requirements as they appear in the unit specifications.

Almost all centres assessed Research Skills as a stand-alone unit. Only two centres integrated Research Skills with graded units.

HR1C 46 Workplace Communication in English

HP75 47 Communication: Business Communication

All centres selected for Communication qualification verification used the SQA ASPs for assessment and re-assessment effectively, ensuring that assessment instruments were valid, reliable, practicable, equitable and fair. All centres adhered to the correct conditions of assessment. Some centres continued to successfully adapt assessments as staff and students worked from home due to pandemic restrictions.

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

General

All centres recorded their learners' assessment achievements using results templates. In almost all cases these were satisfactory. In one centre, the results sheets did not show the number of times the learners had attempted the assessment, making it difficult to confirm whether assessment judgements were appropriate. Another centre recorded achievement outcome by outcome but did not include an overall unit pass or fail result.

J1NB 47/HR0Y 47 Research Skills

Assessment judgements were valid in all centres. The standardisation process was sometimes demonstrated by comments of assessors and IVs clearly marked on learners' submissions. The feedback provided to candidates for all outcomes was mainly supportive and clear. However, a few centres gave very little written feedback to learners, making it difficult for learners to understand what they needed to do prior to re-assessment. Written feedback to learners needs to be specific, precise and supportive.

The quality of candidates' assessments was generally very good with almost all centres advising learners to stick to recommended numbers of questionnaire respondents, numbers of questions and word lengths for Outcome 3 investigation reports. In a few centres, there was clear evidence of meaningful discussions between learners and assessors at the start of the units, providing a strong starting point for selection of research topics and the direction of research plans.

In one centre, learners were allowed to be too ambitious in their plans for primary data collection, with one candidate targeting over 300 respondents to questionnaires, causing unnecessary workload. Timely intervention by assessors at the planning stage should be able to prevent learners from being over ambitious. They must re-direct learners to limit their scope to match the level of this unit. Pages 6–7 of the ASP states, 'For interviews and questionnaires, a small sample of about 20 to 40 respondents answering no more than 10 simple questions will be sufficient to develop skills.' If the assessor does not address this, there is a danger that the unit will be over-assessed and therefore unfair to learners.

In some centres, Outcome 3 research investigations were unnecessarily and unhelpfully too long. The minimum word count for the research investigation is 1,000 words. Candidates should be encouraged to stay within a range of 1,000 to 1,800 (not counting references). This will allow candidates to focus on quality when presenting information and taking time to

improve their English. It also forces them to be more discerning as they select information relevant to their research objectives.

Where Research Skills was integrated within graded units, one centre ensured learners used obvious headings within their graded unit investigations to clearly signpost where Research Skills evidence would be found.

Candidates' interpretation of primary data was generally very well evidenced across all centres. A few centres were advised to be stricter with learners who lifted large sections of text from their secondary sources, without correct citation and referencing in their final research reports. Learners must use in-text citation to show clearly where secondary data is being used in their research reports. The citation must link to the references at the end.

HR1C 46 Workplace Communication in English

HP75 47 Communication: Business Communication

Assessment judgements were valid in all centres selected for verification. Almost all centres made effective use of detailed centre-produced marking schemes, which helped to ensure consistency of assessment judgements.

In all centres, Outcome 1 assessments were well presented and accurately assessed.

Feedback provided to learners for all outcomes was almost always supportive and clear. In a few cases, feedback was minimal and vague. Written feedback to learners needs to be specific, precise and supportive, especially when they are being guided to improve their grammar in Outcome 2 reports.

In relation to Workplace Communication in English, Outcome 2 reports were generally well presented in all centres. In one centre, the assessor insisted on the use of Harvard referencing, risking over-assessing for this unit. The requirement for referencing in Workplace Communication in English is only important so far as it contributes to the appropriateness of 'layout, structure and format' of the reports. Strict Harvard referencing does not have to be followed precisely for SCQF level 6. It is good practice to introduce learners to referencing for this unit as knowledge and skills are developed. Assessors can then enforce a formal referencing system more strictly when they start the SCQF level 7 Business Communication unit, where this is a formal requirement.

A small number of centres are not asking learners to state word counts on the front covers of reports. This should always be done so verifiers can see at a glance whether minimum word counts have been met.

Almost all centres provided video evidence to support verification of Outcome 3 assessment. Most were clearly labelled, and the quality of video and audio was satisfactory. In a few cases, it was difficult to match the learners on screen to the accompanying checklists and written documentation. Centres should take steps to ensure that learners can be identified such as using place cards, name badges or introducing themselves clearly at the beginning of recordings.

In a small number of centres, assessors were asked to pay greater attention to whether candidates tried to read their Outcome 3 presentations from PowerPoint slides or from scripts. Assessors were reminded that the Outcome 3 assessment for SCQF level 6 and level 7 units requires learners to present information to others, use appropriate language and tone, use non-verbal skills to promote interaction and respond to others. These cannot be demonstrated if the learner simply reads a text. Learners who read presentations must be re-assessed.

Areas of good practice reported by qualification verifiers

General

The following good practice was reported during session 2021–22:

♦ CPD records included a section for reflection and an explanation of how staff benefited from participation in training events.
♦ Analytical, evaluative post-delivery review reports were action focused.

J1NB 47/HR0Y 47 Research Skills

The following good practice was reported during session 2021–22:

♦ Meaningful discussions between learners and assessors at the start of the unit provided a strong starting point for selection of research topics and the direction of research plans.
♦ When integrating within graded units, the use of obvious headings within graded unit investigations clearly signposted Research Skills evidence.

HR1C 46 Workplace Communication in English

HP75 47 Communication: Business Communication

The following good practice was reported during session 2021–22:

♦ Clearly recorded and well labelled video evidence supported verification of Outcome 3.

Specific areas for development

General

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

♦ CPD records to be personalised to each individual and include subject-specific entries.
♦ Consider external verifier recommendations which are intended to improve assessment and/or verification practices and ensure future compliance.

- Minutes of meetings should be detailed and meaningful, accurately reflecting decisions and actions.
- Learners' assessment results templates should show the number of attempts and an overall unit pass or fail result.
- Learners should be discouraged from presenting excessively long Outcome 3 reports. Instead, they should focus on quality and being more discerning in information selection.

J1NB 47/HR0Y 47 Research Skills

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

- Assessment checklists must reflect the exact evidence requirements as they appear in the unit specification.
- Written feedback to learners needs to be specific, precise and supportive.
- Timely intervention by assessors at the planning stage will prevent learners from being over ambitious with primary data gathering.
- Learners must use in-text citation and referencing to show where secondary data is used in their research reports.

HR1C 46 Workplace Communication in English

HP75 47 Communication: Business Communication

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

- Written feedback to learners needs to be specific, precise and supportive.
- Learners should state word counts on the front covers of reports so verifiers can confirm that requirements have been met.
- Centres to ensure that learners can be identified during video recording and matched to written evidence.
- Assessors to pay greater attention to candidates reading Outcome 3 presentations from PowerPoint slides or from scripts. Learners who read presentations must be re-assessed.