

# Combined Assessment Toolkit: Information and guidance for centres



This document can be produced, on request, in alternative formats, including large type, Braille and numerous community languages. For further details telephone SQA's Customer Contact Centre on 0845 279 1000.

SQA is committed to using plain English. We will try to make our publications as easy and straightforward to understand as we can, and will try to avoid all unnecessary jargon. If there's any language in this document that you feel is hard to understand, or could be improved, please write to Editor, Editorial Team, at the Glasgow address or email: [editor@sqa.org.uk](mailto:editor@sqa.org.uk).

Publication date: October 2020

Publication code: BB8275

Published by the Scottish Qualifications Authority  
The Optima Building, 58 Robertson Street, Glasgow G2 8DQ  
Lowden, 24 Wester Shawfair, Dalkeith, EH22 1FD

[www.sqa.org.uk](http://www.sqa.org.uk)

The information in this publication may be reproduced in support of SQA qualifications. If it is reproduced, SQA should be clearly acknowledged as the source. If it is to be used for any other purpose, written permission must be obtained from SQA. It must not be reproduced for trade or commercial purposes.

© Scottish Qualifications Authority

# Contents

|    |  |   |
|----|--|---|
| 1. | Overview of the toolkit  | 1 |
|    | Approaching combined assessment                                      | 2 |
|    | What is 'combined assessment' and how should a centre approach this? | 3 |
|    | Where do I start?  | 3 |
|    | Step 1: Identify the units to be combined                            | 4 |
|    | Step 2: Provide a rationale  | 5 |
|    | Step 3: Develop the assessment plan/matrix                           | 5 |
|    | Step 4: Think about the candidates                                   | 6 |
|    | Step 5: Quality assurance  | 7 |
|    | Collaboration with other centres                                     | 7 |
| 2. | SQA support  | 7 |
|    | Pre-Verification Services  | 8 |

---

## Overview of the toolkit

This toolkit has been designed to complement our publication [Supporting the delivery, assessment and verification of SQA units, session 2020–21: Information and guidance for centres](#) and provide further support for centres in developing a combined assessment approach for session 2020–21.

### 1 Approaching combined assessment

We are encouraging centres, and course teams, 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. SQA will also offer (wherever possible) flexibility around conditions of assessment, making delivery more accessible for both staff and students.

Implementing a combined approach to the collection of candidate generated evidence, where this is possible, should reduce assessment requirements by addressing duplication or overlapping assessment.

You need to maintain the integrity of all qualifications where combined assessment is used, and you can do this by ensuring that the **Three Core Principles** continue to be at the heart of your decision making:

1. Fairness to all learners.
2. Safe and secure certification of qualifications, while following the latest public health advice.
3. Maintaining the integrity and credibility of the qualification system, ensuring that standards are maintained over time, in the interests of learners.



---

We are committed to providing guidance and support to you as new approaches to assessment are devised. There will be a requirement for SQA to endorse any new approach to ensure that assessments are valid, reliable, practicable, safe and equitable for candidates. To help you achieve this, we have designed support mechanisms for combined assessment — see section 3 for more details.

We are keen to guide and support centres who wish to combine assessments in the delivery of SQA programme frameworks. Such an approach can:

- take less time
- avoid over-assessment and improve motivation
- make the assessment process more meaningful and enjoyable for candidates
- facilitate internal and external verification
- give assurance of overall competence
- benefit learning

Ideally, you would seek advice and guidance from us — support is available to centres who wish to consult with one another and collaborate on submitting combined assessments to SQA.

There is more information that is relevant to combined assessment in the following SQA publications:

- Supporting the Delivery, Assessment and Verification of SQA units — Session 2020–21: Information and Guidance for Centres
- SQA Guide to Assessment
- The Qualification Verification Process: Guidance for Centres

## **What is ‘combined assessment’ and how should a centre approach this?**

There is no single definition of combined assessments, and there are various interpretations of what it means. Broadly, though, a combined assessment approach is where a centre looks at a qualification structure and maps out how assessment tasks can be combined in a way that ensures that candidate evidence meets the required standard and is not diluted in any way which would compromise the integrity of the qualification. A centre may decide to combine assessments in an SQA qualification for several reasons. For instance:

- to reduce the overall number of assessments
- to change the duration of the delivery model
- to support the implementation of a blended learning approach
- to streamline the assessment delivery
- combining assessments can reduce repetition

---

## What is ‘combined assessment’ and how should a centre approach this?

There is no single definition of combined assessments, and there are various interpretations of what it means. Broadly, though, a combined assessment approach is where a centre looks at a qualification structure and maps out how assessment tasks can be combined in a way that ensures that candidate evidence meets the required standard and is not diluted in any way which would compromise the integrity of the qualification. A centre may decide to combine assessments in an SQA qualification for several reasons. For instance:

- to reduce the overall number of assessments
- to change the duration of the delivery model
- to support the implementation of a blended learning approach
- to streamline the assessment delivery
- combining assessments can reduce repetition

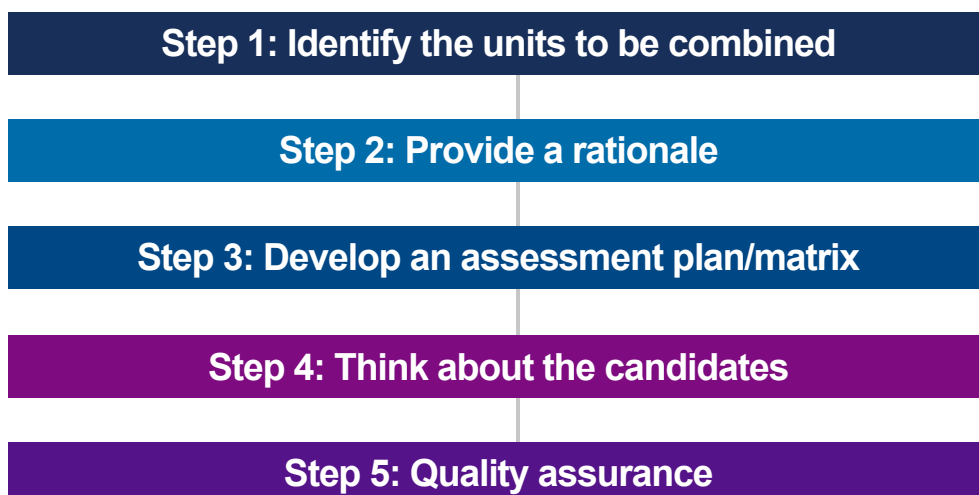
### Where do I start?

Look at the overall qualification framework and try to decide where combined assessments could be achieved, by using subject specialist members of staff with a good understanding of the units.

Keep an open mind. Don’t jump in. Think about this carefully and don’t over-complicate the combined assessment process for the learner. Is there a natural crossover between units or parts of units? Use the right people with the knowledge of the units and delivery methods, so that a consistent approach is taken for the learners.

Gain agreement with all course team members to ‘buy in’ to the combined assessment process and the individual roles. A robust approach is one that engages subject specialist(s) for specific units to work in collaboration with the person doing the combined assessment mapping.

Agree timescales, and the SCQF level to be maintained, and discuss appropriate instruments of assessment for combined assessment.



---

## Step 1: Identify the units to be combined

Start small and think about trying to combine assessment between a few units rather than the whole group award at this stage. It's important that you don't attempt to combine too many units — this may become overwhelming. Plan the process out — for example get your team together, select your units and assign roles and responsibilities to the course team.

You should think about the number of assessments your centre plans to use in a qualification. It is not necessary to design an assessment activity to assess each unit outcome, assessment standard, performance criterion, skills or knowledge separately.

A combined assessment can be developed from identifying similar assessment requirements in different units, so a carefully designed combined assessment will remove the need for duplicate assessments. Alternatively, you may be able 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.

### Key steps in developing combined assessments

- Get to know each unit — take time to familiarise yourself with the units and their specific requirements, content and standards
- Create an assessment plan
- Consider the candidate
- Choose appropriate assessment methods
- Develop the assessment
- Define evidence requirements for the combined assessment

### Mapping the combined assessment

The centre will identify subject-specific staff to carry out the initial mapping of the combined assessment. You will have access to a range of SQA publications and mapping templates on combined assessment to support you at this stage.

## Step 2: Provide a rationale

This service has been offered in previous years and will remain unchanged for single unit submissions.

The addition this year is the inclusion of prior verification of combined assessment with an optional virtual feedback meeting which will involve the external verifiers who completed the review of the combined assessment documentation.

You can find details on our prior verification web page. We recommend that you use this service when producing an instrument of assessment.

## Step 3: Develop the assessment plan/matrix

Use a combined assessment matrix/assessment plan template to show what you are doing. Be clear about the units and the evidence requirements you are combining.

- Map this out using the evidence requirements for the unit specifications.
- Really study the Unit Specification as this determines the national standard.
- You should also consult any relevant exemplification materials.
- Be brave and really think about how the assessment tasks can be combined to meet as much of the evidence requirements as possible without compromising the qualification standards.

It is good practice to draw up an assessment plan that aligns each unit outcome with the learning process and the acquisition of knowledge and skills and indicates when the combined assessment should take place. The activities included in the **assessment plan** should be **cross-referenced back to the outcomes of each unit**. This will help to ensure that the outcomes of all the units have been achieved.

Once you have set out the assessment matrix for the combined assessment, think about whether you can do this in your own right as an SQA approved centre, or perhaps it might be that you want to propose this for a consortium to develop further. You could also consider how others can benefit from this too — for example, all FE colleges who deliver the qualification.





## Step 4: Think about the candidates

If you decide to develop a combined assessment, you should consider how you will deal with any need for candidate remediation and re-assessment.

The assessment plan should be shared with all assessors and internal verifiers. Candidates should also be given relevant information.

To ensure that your assessments are equitable and fair, you should also consider these questions:

- Does the assessment offer all candidates an equal opportunity to achieve?
- Are the scenarios or contexts in the combined assessment open and comprehensible to all candidates?
- Could any part of the combined assessment or the assessment itself have an adverse impact on individual candidates?
- Does any illustrative material reflect an inclusive view of society which promotes equality?

In accordance with legislation, SQA's policy on assessment arrangements for candidates with additional support needs allows reasonable adjustments to be made to published assessment arrangements. For guidance on assessment arrangements for candidates with additional support needs, consult the Assessment Arrangements web page.

## Step 5: Quality assurance

You must design the instruments of assessment with an associated marking guideline and carry out an internal IV check before sending these to SQA for prior verification. It would be advantageous to include any mapping/matrix documentation used during the development process of the instrument of assessment. Please refer to the section '**Key steps in developing combined assessments**' under Step 1 above.

Finally, think about any adaptations to the conditions of assessment, and ensure these are determined in line with the subject specific requirements issued by SQA, and with the qualification requirements.

If you are developing a combined assessment across units, you must be sure that the content of each unit is sufficiently related to make the assessment coherent and meaningful to learners.

When developing a combined assessment, please be aware of the 'Guidance on Approaches to Assessment for each Unit' found in the support notes of each unit specification. It provides an example of assessment that is valid, reliable, and practicable. The assessment tasks should correspond to the guidance given in the unit specification.

Some assessment methods lend themselves more easily to combining outcomes and units than others. [See our Guide to Assessment, page 12](#). You must also take care that combining assessments does not make the assessment task more difficult for the candidate by creating higher levels of demand than would be required were the assessments not combined.

## Collaboration with other centres

When developing a combined assessment, it is worth considering collaboration with other centres. This would ensure the best use of resources and would avoid duplication of combined assessment approaches for units/group awards.

To find out details of SQA approved centres you should contact SQA's Customer Contact Centre.

---

## 2. SQA support

### Combined Assessment Pre-Verification Services

SQA's Combined Assessment Pre-Verification Services provides support and prior verification feedback to presenting centres. This will give you confidence that a newly-developed combined assessment instrument is fit for purpose and does not compromise standards specified in any unit. The Pre-Verification Service provided for combined assessment is designed to support you through all stages of the process, as outlined below.

### External verifier support

You may decide to initiate a request to SQA for EVs to attend a meeting. We will arrange for one or more subject-specific external verifiers to attend to provide development and support. (It is important, though, that you give us sufficient prior notice.)

External verifiers will be able to provide support and advice on the proposed combined assessment approach. You can request support at different points in the development of the combined assessment:

- **Development support:** support provided by the external verifier during the initial development of the combined assessment. At this stage, you will be encouraged to continue with the development of the combined assessment whilst considering the advice and support provided at the meeting.
- **Document support:** if you have developed your combined assessment documentation but feel the need for additional support to complete this activity, you can request support from an external verifier. It is important to note that at this stage, the external verifier is not signing off an instrument of assessment as valid, but will provide advice and feedback on any documentation presented.

The role of the verifier, in any of these stages, will be to provide guidance and support to the centre with specific regard to the proposed combined assessment approach and or documentation — for example:

- Is it clear what is being combined?
- Is the centre using current documents, eg Group Award Arrangements, Unit Specifications, etc?
- What are the arrangements for the conditions of assessment — have these changed? If they have changed, is this a safe and valid alternative?
- Are the planned instruments of assessment fit for purpose?
- Who is involved in the development of the combined assessment, and do they have sufficient subject knowledge and expertise?
- What internal quality checks are going to be carried out within the centre and by whom?
- Is the progress of the combined assessment documentation on track?

To access this service, please complete the SQA [‘Combined Assessment support request’](#) form which is available on the Prior Verification web page.

## Combined assessment prior review

This is where you will have the opportunity to fully submit the combined assessment proposal. There is no meeting involved at this stage, and you should be confident in your submission. It is important that what has been combined is clear, and that you have identified:

- name of the qualification
- units
- corresponding group award and unit codes

It is crucial that the mapping grid can be understood and is not so complicated as to distort the process. It must be clear and unambiguous. The review team will discuss and review the submission.

A final decision — Accepted or Not Accepted — will be made on the submission, and a detailed report will be provided to the centre following the prior review decision.

If a 'Not Accepted' decision is returned, you can request a support meeting with the external verifier. This will help you understand the changes we need you to make to your instruments of assessment and will support your progress towards an 'Accepted' decision.

When your combined assessment is 'Accepted', it will be uploaded to the SQA Secure site (with your permission).

To access this service, complete the '[Prior Verification request form](#)', which is available on the Prior Verification web page