

curriculum for excellence  
building the curriculum 5  
a framework for assessment:  
quality assurance and moderation

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## Background

The *Assessment for Curriculum for Excellence – Strategic Vision and Key Principles* was published in September 2009. That paper outlined certain key characteristics of a national system for quality assurance and moderation of assessment. It placed assessment practices firmly within the aims of *Curriculum for Excellence* which include improving approaches to learning and teaching and raising standards of achievement for all learners. Learning and teaching, curriculum and assessment are seen within *Curriculum for Excellence* as a single set of activities. These range across planning learning, teaching and assessment engaging all learners to ensure the best possible outcomes for all. The *Strategic Vision and Key Principles* states that:

‘Scottish Government, education authorities and other partners will work together to build on local and national practices for **quality assurance and moderation** of assessment. The aim will be to achieve consistency in standards and expectations and build trust and confidence in teachers’ judgements. Education authorities and national partners will work together to develop the most efficient and effective approaches possible for quality assurance and moderation.’

This paper develops the features of quality assurance and moderation in assessment 3 to 18, provides examples of current practices and proposes how these can be further developed for *Curriculum for Excellence*. Finally, a possible model to support implementation is described.

## Purpose: what is it for?

Quality assurance helps to support teachers and build expertise and capacity in the education system to deliver positive outcomes for children and young people. Through sharing, understanding and applying standards and expectations, quality assurance helps to raise standards and expectations and levels of consistency across teachers and schools. It is important in the planning and coordination of professional development activities that a partnership and inter-establishment approach is adopted to ensure cross-service and cross-sector working on standards and expectations.

Quality assurance in education is part of the day-to-day work of pre-school centres, primary, special and secondary schools, services and local authorities. Staff use a wide range of activities to ensure that high standards are maintained and outcomes improved for children and young people. These include monitoring, self-evaluation and planning for improvement. Since assessment is integral to learning, teaching and the curriculum, these quality assurance approaches apply equally to assessment.

Quality assurance relating specifically to assessment includes:

- > activities to ensure assessment materials and exemplification, including those that will be available through the National Assessment Resource meet standards and expectations
- > local quality improvement processes in education authorities as part of ensuring appropriate standards in education
- > quality assurance for National Qualifications and other SQA qualifications
- > quality assurance approaches of other awarding bodies
- > HMIE inspections as part of external evaluation



Rigorous and robust **quality assurance** gives confidence in teachers' judgements and provides assurance to parents and others that all learners receive appropriate recognition for their achievements in line with agreed national standards and are progressing in line with expectations.

Where assessment is for high stakes qualifications and certification, particular safeguards are required to guarantee fairness to all young people and to provide confidence to parents, colleges, universities and employers. SQA has a range of well-established quality assurance procedures in place for its qualifications. Rigorous and robust procedures will also be important as part of the broad general education and in particular at points of transition in order to ensure the reliability of information shared about progress and achievements.

## Quality assurance: definitions

**Moderation** is the term used to describe approaches for arriving at a shared understanding of standards and expectations for the broad general education. It involves teachers, and other professionals as appropriate, working together, drawing on guidance and exemplification and building on existing standards and expectations to:

- > plan learning, teaching and assessment
- > check that assessment tasks and activities provide learners with fair and valid opportunities to meet the standards and expectations before assessments are used
- > sample evidence from learners' work and review teachers' judgements
- > agree strengths in learners' performances and next steps in learning
- > provide feedback on teachers' judgements to inform improvements in practices

Moderation helps to ensure that there is an appropriate focus on outcomes for learners, that learning is at the appropriate level and that learners develop the skills for learning, skills for life and skills for work, including higher order thinking skills, which will allow them to be successful in the future. Teachers involved in developing their assessment approaches through participation in moderation activities is a highly effective form of professional development.

## Quality assurance of SQA Qualifications

**Verification** is one of a range of quality assurance measures used by SQA to confirm that assessment tasks and activities provide learners with fair and valid opportunities to meet the standards. It is the term used to describe the approaches to ensuring that centres'<sup>1</sup> assessment decisions are valid and reliable and are in line with national standards.

SQA expects its centres to be responsible for the **Internal Verification** of their assessments. This means that centres should have an internal quality assurance system, with effective quality checks in place, to ensure that assessment decisions are consistent between staff assessing the same qualification.

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<sup>1</sup> SQA uses the term centres to describe schools, colleges and other providers SQA approves to deliver SQA qualifications



**External Verification** is carried out by SQA to ensure that:

- > national standards are being uniformly applied
- > assessments are accurately and consistently applied across all centres and levels
- > feedback is provided on teachers' judgements to inform improvements in practices

**Systems Verification** ensures that centres have adequate internal quality assurance systems, and that these are sufficiently well documented.

## Local and national practices to quality assurance and moderation

Efficient and effective approaches to quality assurance and moderation will require building on local practices, developing working approaches across education authorities and partners and linking this work at a national level. National approaches will include opportunities for collaboration both virtual (for example, through Glow and SQA Academy) and face-to-face (for example, through national network groups and professional development workshops).

The **National Assessment Resource** will have a central function in providing national guidance and advice and in exemplifying standards and expectations. It will support teachers in developing a shared understanding and to achieve greater confidence and consistency in their professional judgements.

## Features of quality assurance and moderation in assessment 3 to 18

Quality assurance and moderation:

- > is **robust and rigorous** and gives confidence in teachers' judgements
- > provides the opportunity for teachers to **collaborate** and participate in professional dialogue and collegiate working
- > ensures **fairness** to all children and young people and is **open and transparent** to all staff, parents and learners
- > is **fit for purpose** and **proportionate** with processes articulating across stages and sectors
- > fosters **mutual trust, openness** to different ideas and **respect** for the different skills, experience and understanding that all participants bring
- > ensures that **learning, teaching and assessment** is planned in a **coherent** way and that **assessment is valid and reliable**
- > provides opportunities for **feedback** and **planning for improvement**
- > is **manageable** and the methods used are accessible and easily arranged with ongoing professional dialogue as a key component
- > promotes **learner engagement** through learners discussing criteria, sharing and reviewing samples of their work and identifying strategies they found helpful to their learning
- > promotes **capacity building** of assessment expertise, professional learning and development and quality improvement as integral to quality assurance processes



## Quality assurance and moderation embedded in values and principles of *Curriculum for Excellence*

*Curriculum for Excellence* aims to raise standards of achievement for all children and young people from 3 to 18. This requires us to have effective quality assurance and moderation processes in place. The *Strategic Vision and Key Principles* states that:

‘The practices for arriving at a shared understanding of standards and expectations involve teachers:

- > working together from the guidance provided to plan learning, teaching and assessment
- > building on existing standards and expectations
- > drawing on exemplification
- > engaging with colleagues to share and confirm expectations’

Quality assurance and moderation has to strike the right balance between effort and sustainability by having approaches across 3 to 18 that are appropriate to the ages and stages of learners and are proportionate.

Proportionality would apply within the curriculum at particular stages, for example focusing on literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing as key components of the broad general education and the common responsibility of all teachers. Where we have high stakes assessment, for example for qualifications, quality assurance and moderation will naturally focus on ensuring that national standards have been applied across Scotland. SQA will, of course, support centres by providing clear and accessible exemplification to help staff to understand standards and to apply those national standards locally. Further detailed guidance in respect of these will be developed and be published by SQA in relation to new and revised qualifications.

At other stages and for other ages, quality assurance might emphasise the importance of planning engaging and exciting learning experiences that will focus on achieving the standards and expectations defined through the experiences and outcomes. The curriculum levels and the three-dimensional approach to assessment (breadth, challenge and application of learning, including higher order thinking skills) will be used to inform expectations and the planning of coherent approaches to learning, teaching and assessment.

Moderation is particularly important at points of transition in order to share standards and expectations across sectors and providers. This will ensure confidence in assessment judgements and reliability of information so that children and young people can experience continuity and progression in their learning.



## Current approaches to quality assurance and moderation of assessment in the education sector

Pre-school centres, schools, colleges and education authorities currently have a range of effective practices that contribute to ensuring consistency and a shared understanding and application of standards and expectations. The following are examples of current practice although these are not yet used consistently.

Pre-school centres, primary, special and secondary schools:

- > Through focused learning visits to classes, staff evaluate learning and engage in professional dialogue about children's progress, thereby ensuring consistently high standards
- > Senior staff, for example headteachers, depute headteachers, principal teachers and faculty heads sample learners' work. Follow-up professional dialogue focuses on expectations, strengths of learners' performance, quality of feedback and agreeing next steps in learning
- > Individual teachers adopt strategies to avoid pre-judging outcomes, for example marking learners' work without being provided with names
- > Teachers, when teaching children at the same stage, share the same preparation time to allow collaborative planning, peer review and discussion of standards and expectations
- > Departmental meetings regularly include planning learning, teaching and assessment together in a coherent way. Staff are able to share effective strategies which they know have improved learning and achievement
- > Standards and expectations are shared though displaying learners' work aligned to levels to show progression, for example in writing displayed on a 'learning wall'
- > Professional dialogue focuses on examples of learners' work that has been pre-marked to help reach an agreed view on quality and standards and to identify next steps in learning, particularly at points of transition
- > Staff use benchmark data of similar schools to compare their learners' achievements to that of others
- > Staff engage children and young people in discussions about progress and target-setting as part of planning to meet their learning needs

In secondary departments (in addition to the activities listed above):

- > Teachers cross-mark end of topic tests, unit assessments and prelims by marking pupils' work in other classes or groups and engage in professional dialogue about the results
- > Assessment materials, marking schemes and marking records are developed and agreed across the department with faculty heads/principal teachers sampling learners' work and checking consistency of marking
- > Teachers use a range of resources provided by SQA to help understanding of the national standards, for example, the Understanding Standards website, SQA Academy, professional development workshops, Quality Networks, Marking Instructions, Principal Assessors and External Verifier reports





- > Secondary teachers are appointed as for example, Principal Assessors, Setters, Verifiers, Examiners and Markers by SQA to support the development and delivery of National Qualifications and share their expertise in their school and education authority
- > Learning outcomes are used to set short- and long-term targets

Education authorities:

- > Staff carry out verification visits to validate accuracy of schools' self-evaluation evidence and sample quality and consistency of learning, teaching and assessment
- > Collate and analyse a range of local and national data, including STACs information. This is used as the basis of discussion with headteachers, deputies and faculty heads/principal teachers to inform planning for improvement in learners' achievements
- > Identify good practice and organise good practice events for staff across schools within the authority to share expectations and practice
- > Staff facilitate cross-sectoral professional dialogue to share practice. For example, 'Experiences and Outcomes Teams' with staff from different pre-school, primary, special and secondary schools plan learning teaching and assessment to ensure progression

Colleges:

- > Further education colleges already have well-established systems of quality assurance and moderation of assessment linked to qualifications and awards that they offer
- > Staff use these processes to achieve consistency and reliability with a high degree of autonomy, for example working to college and SQA arrangements
- > Quality assurance and moderation approaches are developed in line with college policies and designed to ensure consistency of judgements
- > Internal moderation procedures involve approaches such as sampling evidence of learning and cross-checking assessments within and across departments

(Several of these examples are given in more detail in *Learning Together: Opening up learning* (HMIE, 2009))

All these working practices across education authorities, schools and colleges form a strong basis for developing quality assurance and moderation arrangements for the future.



## Developing quality assurance for *Curriculum for Excellence*

Quality assurance needs to be flexible: what it looks like will depend on the context of individual schools and education authorities and will build on existing effective practices. In developing systematic approaches to the quality assurance and moderation of assessment across Scotland, support structures have to be put in place so that local and national practices are fully aligned and everyone is clear about roles and responsibilities. The overall aim, as part of *Curriculum for Excellence*, is to raise expectations and standards of achievement for all learners.

## The National Assessment Resource

The purpose of the National Assessment Resource is to provide support for a single coherent assessment system through which understanding and professional practice in assessment and expectations and standards for *Curriculum for Excellence* will be developed and shared.

The National Assessment Resource will provide a single place in which assessment materials for *Curriculum for Excellence* can be stored. This includes assessment material developed by SQA, LTS and those developed by teachers. It will include examples of practice which illustrate standards and expectations across curriculum areas, stages, experiences and outcomes and qualifications. Teachers will use these materials as part of their moderation and verification practices.

Fundamental to the success of the National Assessment Resource is the availability of a wide range of high quality assessment guidance, resources and illustrations of learners' performance which exemplify expected standards across the range of learning in the experiences and outcomes and in qualifications.

The quality of the materials available from the National Assessment Resource will be critical. For those developed by SQA, existing quality assurance processes will continue to be applied. For materials developed by teachers, partners will work closely together to develop procedures for quality assurance and to ensure that agreed standards are applied rigorously in order to accurately exemplify national standards and expectations.

## Support structures and processes to support quality assurance and moderation in assessment

The following diagram summarises the range of people, support structures and processes within the education system that will be in place to support quality assurance of and moderation in assessment. As can be seen from the diagram, all staff engaging with learners contribute to the quality assurance of assessment and its moderation. Working together and harnessing the range of support processes and resources available and in development, a rigorous and systematic national approach to quality assurance and moderation will be developed. At the same time, a national approach depends on the engagement of all concerned, including children and young people themselves and their understanding of the role of assessment in improving standards of achievement.



Organisations and processes	People
National Agencies: LTS, SQA, HMIE, Scottish Government	National networks
At local level: Education authorities Collegiate support CPD	Local networks including clusters of associated schools
Jointly organised processes: Sharing data Benchmarking	Headteachers Other Senior Managers Principal Teachers/Faculty Heads Teachers, educators and other practitioners
Nationally coordinated resources: Glow National Assessment Resource Scottish Survey of Literacy and Numeracy SQA Understanding Standards website SQA Academy	Learners

The following describes the processes and activities that will be expected as part of local and national quality assurance and moderation in assessment.

**At school level**, teachers need to have opportunities to discuss and share expectations across the curriculum with a view to achieving consistency. These expectations also apply more widely at associated schools group/cluster level and in colleges and other providers, where examples of standards and expectations can be shared, particularly in key areas such as literacy and numeracy. Exemplification material will help to make standards and progression clearer and support reliable assessment.

**Teachers and other practitioners** will continue to work collaboratively to develop approaches to monitoring, self-evaluation and improvement planning, building on the existing strengths of their practice. **Learners** have a key role in moderation activities and teachers have an important responsibility in developing that role. **Moderation activities will involve all teachers in engaging regularly in ongoing professional dialogue and collegiate working including by participating in local and national networking activities.** Ongoing professional dialogue is a key component for coherent planning, checking, sampling, reviewing and providing feedback for improvement. Such collaboration and use of resources including those in the National Assessment Resource will help ensure that teachers develop a shared understanding of standards and expectations and apply these fairly and consistently. By taking part in such activities, teachers will be involved in high-quality, ongoing professional development.



**Curriculum planners and managers** (headteachers, depute headteachers, faculty heads/principal teachers) will build on existing practices to ensure that quality assurance and moderation activities are fit for purpose, proportionate, manageable and accessible. This will include providing opportunities and support for staff working collaboratively on moderation, verification, CPD activities and contributing to the National Assessment Resource. They will ensure an appropriate focus on coherent planning, checking, sampling, reviewing and providing feedback for improvement. Managers can also ensure that appropriate target-setting, monitoring and tracking of learners' progress is in place and that self-evaluation is based on a wide range of evidence across all aspects of learning including benchmarking information to inform improvement planning and raising achievement for all learners.

External quality assurance will focus on the judgements teachers make and on internal quality assurance practices. **Education authorities** will have a key role in ensuring that schools have suitable arrangements in place to support teachers' judgements and focus on any action required for improvement.

**Education authorities** will continue to support and challenge self-evaluation and improvement processes. Education authorities have a responsibility to secure improvement in the quality of schools education and to ensure appropriate standards in education. This includes sampling the quality and consistency of learning, teaching, assessment and achievement in schools within the authority. They also need to ensure that their schools are participating in local and national quality assurance and moderation activities with a view to sharing and applying national standards and expectations consistently. Authorities need to facilitate local networks and contribute to identifying the focus of moderation and verification activities to ensure fitness for purpose and proportionality. This will include ensuring an appropriate focus on moderation across transitions and involving partners across sectors. Education authorities will facilitate developing effective collaboration across education authorities and partners and linking local practices with those at a national level. Where HMIE make recommendations for improvements in quality assurance and moderation, education authorities will support and challenge schools to ensure appropriate follow-through activities focus on the required improvements.

## At national level

**Learning and Teaching Scotland** will facilitate professional development in the quality assurance and moderation of assessment to help teachers gain a shared understanding of concepts such as that of a broad general education.

**The Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA)** working with key partners, will ensure that standards and expectations for National Qualifications are consistent with the values, purposes and principles of *Curriculum for Excellence* and include the breadth, level of challenge and application of learning. SQA will provide external quality assurance for National Qualifications to ensure consistency in assessment judgements to national standards and quality assurance practices within schools, education authorities and in colleges and other providers.

SQA will provide advice, support and professional development on assessment, standards and quality assurance of National Qualifications. SQA will also monitor and support schools' and colleges' internal quality assurance mechanisms and actively engage with schools, colleges and local authorities to support and enhance local quality assurance arrangements. The national awards network can also contribute to such developments.



As part of inspections, HMIE will report on the effectiveness of improvement through self-evaluation and make recommendations where practice needs to be improved. HMIE will aim where practicable, to include at least one school in every group of associated schools within its inspection programme in any one year and will review the arrangements for moderation within that group of schools. This will support, promote and extend the quality and rigour of the moderation process and ensure regular national coverage.

HMIE evaluate improvement through self-evaluation (QI 5.9) as part of inspections and in the future this will include reviewing the arrangements for moderation. This will complement the work that schools and education authorities do in moderating assessment. HMIE will evaluate the effectiveness of local and national moderation in developing a shared understanding of standards and expectations within the school.

## Reporting – How do we ensure that the quality assurance processes are robust and rigorous and can help to raise achievement for all?

Mechanisms need to be in place to report on the effectiveness of quality assurance and moderation. In developing a clearer understanding of standards, the analysis of benchmarking data and information on the learners' achievements can assist in formulating action to help improve outcomes for all children and young people. The *Strategic Vision and Key Principles* provided the commitment to developing a process to sharing information:

'To enable schools to use benchmarking information, the Scottish Government will develop from its previous work with education authorities a process to enable sharing of information about learners' performance at school level. The Scottish Government will not collate or publish aggregate information nationally.'

Benchmarking involves measuring performance against others with similar characteristics. Its purpose is to help moderate standards and inform school improvement planning. Schools with learners from similar backgrounds can achieve widely different levels of achievement. Benchmarking can inform discussion, reflection upon practice and can be used for school improvement.

**Schools** include in their Standards and Quality reports information on self-evaluation and improvements in practices that have led to improved outcomes for learners. They will be able to comment on the effectiveness of moderation and verification in these reports and include an assurance that staff are following local and national guidance on quality assurance of assessment.

Through Concordat arrangements, **education authorities** have given a commitment to deliver *Curriculum for Excellence*. Having effective quality assurance for assessment in place will be part of that implementation. Education authorities will be able to report on their progress in implementing *Curriculum for Excellence* in line with national guidance and will feed such information into the National Performance Framework.

**HMIE** will report on the effectiveness of improvement through self-evaluation and make recommendations where practice needs to be improved.



**SQA** will provide external quality assurance for National Qualifications and will be able to report on the effectiveness of schools and other centres in achieving consistency in application of national standards through the publication of Principal Assessor and Senior Verifier reports and national, regional and local achievement statistics. For National Qualifications, SQA will also work with schools and education authorities to ensure that appropriate local quality assurance arrangements are in place and operating effectively.





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