
Strategies & Instructions

Activity Guide #3 –Assessing Verification Profiles – May 2002

Dear Partners,

In line with our goal of providing strategies and instructions to help you make the most of the Quality Analysis Verification Tool, Activity Guide#1 covers *Analyzing Changes to FAFSA Fields*, while Activity Guide #2 focuses on *Which Applicants Change FAFSA Data*. You can use the information here in Activity Guide #3 to:

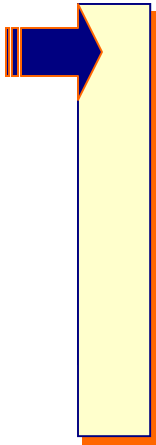
- **Assess the ability of specific institutional profiles to capture “substantial” changes to eligibility for need-based aid**
- **Assess the tendency of specific institutional profiles to select applicants for verification with little to no impact upon eligibility for need-based aid**
- **Determine which institutional profiles to keep and which profiles to fine tune or drop**

This document provides detailed instructions on which reports to run and what to look for while carrying out analyses. The instructions assume that:

- **“Initial” and “paid on” data have been imported into the software and the validation process has been completed (for help on importing data see <http://qaprogram.air.org/download/toolforschool-ISIR%20Guidance.doc> and the desk reference available at <http://sfadownload.ed.gov/softqat0203.htm>).**
- **Institutional verification edit profiles have been established and initial verification flag has been set (for step by step instructions on establishing verification flags refer to <http://qaprogram.air.org/download/ReportingVerification.doc>).**
- **A query selecting applicants who were selected for school verification has been written (see Step One of [Activity Guide #1](#)).**

The analytic activities described here evaluate your current institutional verification profiles. Remember, only schools participating in the Quality Assurance Program have regulatory flexibility concerning the secretary’s edits. All Title IV institutions, however, may use the Quality Analysis Tool to improve any other aspect of their verification process. See Activity Guide #1 for help identifying which FAFSA fields are problematic. Activity Guide #2 will assist you in identifying the applicants who are most likely to experience substantive changes to FAFSA information.

About this document ...



The analytic strategies offered here are suggestions to help you get started with your own analysis. Please feel free to tailor these instructions in ways that best suit your institution's needs – and make full use of any and all of the 15 Quality Analysis Tool reports. If you find ways to improve upon our suggestions or have suggestions of your own, we invite – indeed, we need – your thoughts. A spirit of collaboration has infused the Quality Assurance Program for nearly 20 years. We would welcome the insights of any Title IV institution on how to effectively analyze changes applicants make to FAFSA information.

Step 1 **Create New Queries**

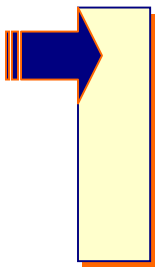
The purpose of verification is to ensure that applicants receive as much aid as they deserve, but no more. Therefore, the most important applicants to verify are those for whom verification results in a “substantial” change in an aid award. The least important applicants to verify are those for whom verification fails to result in any change in aid eligibility. Indeed, where the cost of verification is imposed on cases with zero EFC change, there is no direct benefit. We recommend that you begin your analysis by creating queries that segregate verified applicants into two important sub-groups: those with **no change to EFC** and those with a **substantial change**.

Most schools would agree that failing to change an applicant's EFC is an “insubstantial” result of verification. “Substantial” changes to EFC are more in the eye of the beholder. Most schools would agree that a \$10,000 change in EFC is “substantial,” but the point at which schools decide to draw the line between zero and \$10,000 varies. The Quality Analysis Tool allows you to tailor the substantial threshold to your institution's needs.

Once you have decided on a substantial threshold, prepare for your analysis by combining this condition and the zero EFC change criteria with the “school verification” query you created as part of [Activity Guide #1](#). We recommend that you limit all

analyses discussed in this guide to verified applicants, because you cannot be sure whether or not the “paid on” values (and hence EFC differences) of non-verified applicants are accurate. Follow the steps below to create the substantial query:

1. Within the software select *Tools/Query*
2. Press the *Retrieve* button
3. Select the “verified students” you created during Activity #1
4. **CHANGE** the entry in the *Title* box to reflect the additional criteria, “Verified Students with Substantial Change (500 or more)” – or whatever threshold you choose. Note: If you fail to give the query a new title you will over-write your existing query
5. In the *Field* box select *EFC DIFFERENCE*
6. In the *operator* box select greater than (>)
7. In the *value* box enter 499
8. Press the *AND* button and then the *Append* button, adding the logical condition into the large *Criteria* box
9. In the *Field* box select *EFC DIFFERENCE*
10. In the *operator* box select greater than (<)
11. In the *value* box enter -499
12. Press the *OR* button and then the *Append* button, adding the logical condition into the large *Criteria* box
13. Move the cursor to the second row of the *Criteria* box to highlight *EFC DIFFERENCE > 499*
14. Press the *Add Left {* button
15. Move the cursor to the third row of the *Criteria* box to highlight *EFC DIFFERENCE < -499*
16. Press the *Add Right }* button
17. Press the *Save* button



Note that the instructions for creating the substantial query contain both positive and negative *EFC DIFFERENCE* values. These conditions need to be joined with the conjunction *OR* and set apart from the rest of the query by *}*'s. If you are ONLY interested in analyzing over-awards, then use only positive *EFC DIFFERENCE* amounts. If you are ONLY interested in analyzing under-awards use only negative *EFC DIFFERENCE* amounts.

Follow the steps below to create the “no change” query:

1. Within the software select *Tools/Query*
2. Press the *Retrieve* button
3. Select the “verified students” you created during Activity #1

4. **CHANGE** the entry in the *Title* box to reflect the additional criteria, "Verified Students with Zero EFC Change"
5. In the *Field* box select *EFC DIFFERENCE*
6. In the *operator* box select equal to (=)
7. In the *value* box enter 0
8. Press the *AND* button and then the *Append* button, adding the logical condition into the large *Criteria* box
9. Press the *Save* button

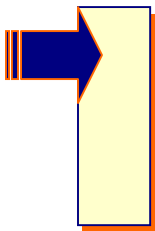
For additional help with the Query function, select *Help / How do I...? / Create a Query* within the Quality Analysis Tool software or review (<http://qaprogram.air.org/download/toolforschool-Queries.doc>)

Step 2

Generate Reports

The Quality Analysis Tool's *List Verification Selection Criteria by Code* report provides a listing of applicants meeting each individual verification criteria your institution uses. The report also provides a count of the number of applicants who met the condition(s) of each institutional profile. Generating a series of these reports, using the queries established in Step 1, will help you answer the following questions:

- Which institutional profiles effectively target a high percentage of applicants with substantial changes to EFC?
- Which institutional profiles "pester" a relatively high percentage of applicants by selecting them for verification but discovering no change to their "initial" EFC?



You can restrict the focus of this analysis by adding additional conditions to the queries created in Step 1. For example you could restrict the analysis to the Pell eligible population by adding the "Pell Grant Eligibility Flag = Y" condition to ALL the queries discussed above, including the "school verification" query.

Follow the directions below to generate three versions of the report:

1. Select *File / Print* or press the *Printer Icon* on the toolbar

2. In the *Print Dialog* window choose "*List – Verification Selection Criteria by Code*"
3. Make sure "*Multiple*" is selected to the right of the report title
4. Select *Report File Destination* (printer, file, or screen). The first time you run a report you will probably want to send the report to the screen for review. After ensuring that you are getting the output you want, choose printer or file to create a permanent copy
5. In the *Options* box, choose to sort the output by either *SSN* or *Last Name*. You also have the option to restrict output to a single *Verification Edit Profile Code*. For this exercise leave the selection as blank, which will return results for all profiles
6. Press the *Selection Criteria* button on the bottom left corner of the *Print* window
7. Once in the *Selection Criteria* window, select the (...) button next to *Query Title* box. This opens the *Query Grid*. We recommend that you begin your analysis by using the "*Verified Students*" query to select only verified students. Select *OK* in the *Query Grid* window and select *OK* in the *Selection Criteria* window to limit analysis to only those students that have been verified
8. Press *OK* in the *Print* window to generate the report
9. Take note of the **Total** number of applicants verified by each profile; this number is provided in the report at the end of each list
10. Repeat steps #1-6
11. Select "Verified Students with Substantial EFC Change" in the *Query Grid*
12. Take note of the number of "**Substantial Change**" applicants verified by each profile.
13. Repeat steps #1-6

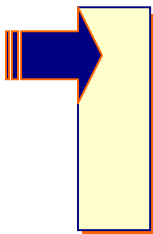
14. Select "Verified Students with Zero EFC Change" in the *Query Grid*
15. Take note of the number of "Zero Change" applicants verified by each profile.

Step 3

Calculate Percentages

To calculate the percentage of applicants verified by each institutional profile where a substantial change occurred divide each of the **Substantial** counts (Step 2, #12) by the corresponding **Total** counts (Step 2, #9). To calculate the percent of applicants "pestered" by each profile divide the **Zero Change** counts (Step 2, #15) by the corresponding **Total** counts (Step 2, #9). Look for:

- Profiles where a relatively high percentage of cases experience a substantial change in EFC
- Profiles where a relatively high percentage of cases experience no change in EFC



The interpretation instructions above are deliberately vague; they do not specify the numeric values that an institutional verification profile should be held up to. We recommend using relative comparisons across your institution's profiles to help identify which of your profiles might be the best candidate for quality improvement efforts.

Relate your findings to your verification practices with an eye on eliminating or trimming verification profiles that "pester" a high percentage of the applicants they select. Unless you find that an institutional verification profile "pesters" an extremely high percentage of cases (greater than 80 percent), you should **consider narrowing the focus** of problematic profiles rather than completely eliminating them. This is particularly true if the profile in question also selects a non-trivial number of substantial change cases. Be wary of making any changes to institutional profiles that currently find a high percentage of substantial changes. You can use the additional analysis discussed below to help determine ways to narrow the focus of verification profiles so they will exclude cases that experience no change in aid eligibility.

Step 4

Follow Up Analysis

Additional reports are available within the Quality Analysis Tool that will guide your “profile-trimming” efforts. These reports will help you figure out which applicants to retain and which applicants to eliminate from profiles that currently select a large number of applicants for verification where no change to EFC occurs.

Use the *Field Change Report* to identify the specific FAFSA fields most likely to change *among cases that meet the condition(s) of the profile being examined*. Focus this report on the desired profile by using the corresponding query to restrict analysis to only these cases. Refer to [Activity Guide #1](#) for step-by-step instructions for generating and interpreting the *Field Change Report*. Use this report to identify which FAFSA elements are responsible for the limited amount of change to EFC that is being captured by the profile.

The FAFSA fields that are found to be the most problematic in the *Field Change Report* can in turn be used to define *Field Increments* for examination in the *Field Range Report with Corrected Field Counts*. If you wish to concentrate your analysis on the impact upon Pell Grant eligibility, then print the *Pell Corrected Record Report*. Focus these reports on the verification profile being considered by incorporating the associated query in the *Selection Criteria*. Refer to [Activity Guide #2](#) for step-by-step instructions for generating and interpreting the *Field Range Report with Corrected Field Counts* and the *Pell Corrected Record Report*. You also may want to examine how changes to eligibility vary across ranges of income or EFC.

The ranges of problematic FAFSA fields, income, or EFC in the *Field Range Report with Corrected Field Counts* or the *Pell Corrected Record Report*, where few corrections are made to fields or where few records experience a change in eligibility, could perhaps be excluded from the profile to narrow its focus.

Step 4 illustrates the iterative nature of all analysis. With every new “answer” enviably comes a new “question.” The three activity guides prepared in this series will no doubt raise many new issues as they increase your awareness of how FAFSA changes effect need-based aid eligibility on your campus.

With this in mind, the guides should not be viewed as an exhaustive list of the analysis possible with the Quality Analysis Tool. We hope you come to view them as an appetizing “first course.” The guides are designed to get you familiar with the main “ingredients” (reports) and “technique” (queries) used in this “kitchen” (software). They are also designed to whet your appetite for additional analysis, of your own design, within the software.