



Guidance on Graded Units: Using the design principles for Higher National Certificates and Diplomas

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Introduction

About Graded Units

In March 2003, following an extensive consultation process, we agreed design principles for HNCs and HNDs (see Appendix 1 for a full description).

One of the design principles is that all HNCs and HNDs will have a number of Graded Units. These are a means of ensuring that candidates have achieved the principal aims of the Group Award. Graded Units do this by assessing the integration of knowledge and skills developed across the individual Units that make up the Group Award. This is not new — many HNCs and HNDs already have strong integrative elements, such as projects — but, by introducing Graded Units, we are extending this good practice to all HNCs and HNDs.

Graded Units will replace Merit as a means of grading candidate achievement.

About this guide

This guide will be of interest to people who are involved in reviewing, designing, and validating HNCs and HNDs using the 2003 design principles, and to anyone involved in the assessment of these HNCs and HNDs. The purpose of this guide is to provide information and guidance on the design and use of Graded Units. It should help:

- ◆ Qualification Design Teams to develop Graded Units using the *HN Graded Unit specification*, which forms part of the qualification proposal for validation
- ◆ centres to develop assessment instruments to meet the requirements of the *HN Graded Unit specifications*
- ◆ assessors and internal verifiers to use Graded Units to assess whether candidates have met the requirements of the HNC or HND, and to grade their candidates' achievement

Useful tips in the guidance are highlighted and look like this:

Graded Units are a means of ensuring that candidates have achieved the principal aims of an HNC or HND

Terminology used in this guide

SCQF: This stands for the Scottish Credit and Qualification Framework. SCQF terminology is used throughout this guide to refer to credits and

levels. For further information on the SCQF see Appendix 2 or visit the SCQF website at www.scqf.org.uk.

SCQF credits: One HN credit is equivalent to 8 SCQF credit points. This applies to all HN Units irrespective of their level.

SCQF levels: The SCQF covers 12 levels of learning. Graded Units will be at level 7 and 8 (see Section 3.2 for more information on this).

Subject Unit: Subject Units contain vocational/subject content and are designed to test a specific set of knowledge and skills.

Graded Unit: Graded Units assess candidates' ability to integrate what they have learned while working towards the Units of the Group Award. Their purpose is to add value to the Group Award, making it more than the sum of its parts, and to encourage candidates to retain and adapt their skills and knowledge.

Graded Units and the 2003 design principles for HNCs and HNDs

To continue and uphold the tradition of Higher National Qualifications as the leading qualifications for technical and first-line management professions, HN qualification designers should adhere to the design principles summarised in Appendix 1.

The purposes of Graded Units are to assess the candidates' ability to integrate and apply the knowledge and skills gained in the HN Units to demonstrate that they have achieved the principal aims of the Group Award, and to grade candidates' achievement.

The design principles state that:

- ◆ *HNCs should normally include one Graded Unit of 8 SCQF credit points at SCQF level 7.
- ◆ *HNDs should normally include one Graded Unit of 8 SCQF credit points at SCQF level 7, plus 16 SCQF credit points of Graded Units at SCQF level 8.

*Qualification Design Teams must always conduct market research, particularly among candidates and employers, to ensure the continuing fitness for purpose of the HNCs and HNDs. Where this clearly indicates that any of the design principles (those marked with an asterisk) need to be reinterpreted or modified, SQA will work with the Qualification Design Team to develop alternatives that are consistent with the other principles. Any re-interpretation or modification of design principles needs to be indicated and negotiated at the outset of development. Design principles cannot be challenged at the point of validation.

The validity of the market research and the fitness for purpose of the proposed alternatives will be agreed by SQA and confirmed at validation.

The Graded Units will be included in the 96 and 240 SCQF credit points required for HNCs and HNDs respectively. HNCs will be designed to be at SCQF level 7 and will have 96 SCQF credit points; and HNDs will be designed to be at SCQF level 8 and will have 240 SCQF credit points.

Validation of Graded Units

At the moment, all HN subject Units are validated by SQA.

Centres with devolved authority may continue to validate Group Awards. As Graded Units relate to the principal aims of a Group Award, these will be validated as part of the Group Award, which means that centres with devolved authority can validate Graded Units. There is more guidance on validation in Section 1.3a.

1 Graded Units: an overview

1.1 Purpose

Under the 2003 design principles, all HNCs and HNDs will be assessed by a combination of Unit assessments and Graded Units. Graded Units will have a number of positive effects on the design and assessment of HNCs and HNDs, including:

- ◆ differentiation of the standard to which candidates achieve the principal aims of the Group Award
- ◆ greater consistency of national standards of assessment in and across HNCs and HNDs
- ◆ smoother progression from National Qualifications to Higher National Qualifications, and from Higher National Qualifications to degree programmes

The purposes of Graded Units are to:

- ◆ assess whether candidates have met the principal aims of the Group Award
- ◆ assess the candidates' ability to retain and integrate the knowledge and/or skills gained in the Units
- ◆ grade candidate achievement

The Qualification Design Team will identify the general aims and specific aims of each particular HNC or HND.

General aims of HNCs and HNDs

All HNCs and HNDs have a range of broad aims that also apply to all equivalent higher education qualifications. Examples include:

- ◆ developing candidates' knowledge and skills such as planning, analysis, and synthesising
- ◆ developing employment skills and enhancing candidates' employment prospects
- ◆ enabling progression in the SCQF
- ◆ developing study and research skills
- ◆ developing transferable skills including Core Skills to the levels demanded by employer and/or progression in higher education

Specific aims of HNCs and HNDs

All HNCs and HNDs have aims that specify the knowledge or skills candidates have to attain to be deemed competent in the

subject/occupational area. For example, in the area of IT/Computing specific aims might include:

- ◆ preparing for employment in an IT/Computing-related post at technician or professional level
- ◆ developing a range of contemporary vocational skills relating to the use, support and development of IT systems
- ◆ developing options to permit an element of vocational specialisation
- ◆ preparing candidates for progression to further studies in Computing or related disciplines

Note: Where an HND incorporates an HNC each Group Award and associated Graded Units must have distinct aims.

1.2 Types of assessment and assessment instruments

Assessment for Graded Units can be project-based or examination-based. Projects are used to assess the application of knowledge and skills. Examinations are used to assess theoretical knowledge and understanding under invigilated conditions. As HNCs and HNDs are, in the main, designed to provide candidates with the knowledge and skills required for entry into employment, we envisage that many Graded Units will take the form of a project.

Project-based assessment instruments that can be used are:

- ◆ case study
- ◆ investigation
- ◆ practical assignment

Examination-based assessment instruments that can be used are:

- ◆ closed-book examination
- ◆ open-book examination

Note: SQA will consider alternatives to, or a combination of, project and examination, provided all issues of validity, reliability, practicality and credibility are adequately addressed by the Qualification Design Team.

Documentation

The types of assessment, and the assessment instrument to be used for the Graded Unit(s), are determined during the qualification development stage and are subject to validation. The Qualification Design Team will develop a *specification* for each Graded Unit — see Appendices 4 and 5

for the shell documents that will be used. These specifications will include:

- ◆ the proposed type of assessment, ie project or examination
- ◆ the proposed assessment instrument
- ◆ details of which principal aims of the Group Award are to be assessed by each Graded Unit
- ◆ guidance on designing the assessment instrument and assessing and grading candidates including any conditions of assessment to be followed

See Section 3 for guidance for Qualification Design Teams on how to complete the Graded Unit specification.

Once the HNC and/or HND has been validated, assessors in centres will use the Graded Unit specification to develop and administer the assessment instrument.

See Sections 4 and 5 for guidance on developing the assessment instrument.

1.3 Quality assurance of Graded Units

1.3a Validation

The Graded Unit is validated at the same time as the Group Award.

The proposed type of the Graded Unit, and the type of assessment instrument to be used, will be validated by SQA or a centre with devolved responsibility. The Graded Unit specification will then form part of the validated HNC and/or HND, and centres will not be able to use any other type of assessment or instrument of assessment.

Guidelines for validating HNCs and HNDs using the design principles can be found in our *Guide to Validation for Validation Panel Members and Qualification Design Teams*. You can find more information on Quality Assurance in *Guide to Assessment and Quality Assurance for Colleges of Further Education*. Both guides are available on our website www.sqa.org.uk.

1.3b Verification

Graded Units are internally assessed. By this, we mean that assessors in the centre will:

- ◆ develop and administer the assessment instrument in accordance with the Graded Unit specification

- ◆ assess candidates using the assessment instrument they have developed
- ◆ decide whether candidates have achieved the specified standards, and, if so, grade that achievement

The centre's assessment instrument, and the candidate evidence it generates, are:

- ◆ subject to the centre's internal verification processes
- ◆ subject to external verification by SQA

Until they gain experience of using the Graded Unit specifications, centres are strongly advised to submit the assessment instruments they have developed (eg project brief and/or examination question paper) to SQA for **prior verification**, before using it with candidates.

We have produced assessment exemplars for Graded Units for consortium devised HNCs and HNDs, and you can use these for assessment, providing the security, integrity, and confidentiality of the assessment is ensured.

SQA verifiers will sample evidence from Graded Units for all HNCs and HNDs from all centres. Selection will be based on centres' verification history together with their familiarity with assessment of each qualification.

There is more information about our external verification process in section 6.

2 Selecting the type of Graded Unit and instruments of assessment

2.1 Project-based Graded Units

Project-based Graded Units are designed to test the application of knowledge and skills in the planning, execution, and evaluation of a given task. The assessment specification should provide details of the task and the evidence that candidates are expected to produce. It should be flexible in terms of the way the project is taken forward so that it can fit both with centres' resources, and with candidates' interests and personal strengths.

Candidates would normally carry out the tasks involved in the project without close supervision. However, some of the tasks, eg writing up a report, conducting a laboratory experiment, answering questions on a pre-researched case study, could be undertaken under invigilated conditions. These should only be used where the conditions of assessment contribute to the national standard and reflect the needs of end-users (such as professional body recognition requirements).

The assessment instrument for project-based Graded Units can take the form of a case study, investigation, or practical assignment.

2.1a Case study

If skills in gathering and interpreting information, analysing, decision-making, and planning for action are to be tested, choose a case study. In this type of assessment, candidates are given an outlined scenario that involves, typically, an organisation, client, service, product, process, or system. The scenario consists of a description of a set of circumstances — this is usually in the form of text, video, picture, or role-play exercise.

This is followed by a series of instructions that prompt candidates to use the information they have gathered to interpret, analyse, and respond to the scenario. They then have to put forward recommendations for follow-up action. Case study scenarios need to reflect the diversity and complexity of society, and the content must not cause offence or impose barriers to achievement.

Candidate evidence requirements are:

- ◆ a plan of action
- ◆ a case study report with conclusions and recommendations

- ◆ evidence showing evaluation/review of the case study

Candidates will be asked to:

- ◆ interpret the outlined scenario
- ◆ identify and research associated cases and/or issues
- ◆ consult relevant individuals, organisations, and agencies
- ◆ develop the outlined scenario
- ◆ analyse and compare responses to the outlined scenario
- ◆ recommend action
- ◆ evaluate the case study

2.1b Investigation

If skills in research, analysis, evaluation, and reporting are being tested, choose an investigation. In this type of assessment instrument, the assessor can direct the choice of investigation, usually by providing candidates with a topic or brief for the subsequent investigation. Alternatively, candidates can select a topic in consultation with the assessor.

Candidate evidence requirements are:

- ◆ a plan of action
- ◆ an investigation report with conclusions and recommendations
- ◆ evidence showing evaluation/review of the investigation

Candidates will be asked to:

- ◆ plan the investigation
- ◆ identify issues for research
- ◆ generate and collect data
- ◆ select/devise and use research methods
- ◆ collate, interpret, and analyse data
- ◆ present findings and conclusions
- ◆ evaluate the investigation

If the investigation is carried out as part of a group investigation, the specification must clearly state how individual contributions will be assessed to ensure **each** candidate has fully met the evidence requirements.

2.1c Practical assignment

If what is being tested is the application of practical skills (and knowledge and understanding) to a situation that involves task management, choose a practical assignment. This assessment instrument is not concerned exclusively with practical activity — candidates are provided with a brief that allows them to demonstrate their creative, interpersonal, and/or management skills directly. For example, in the HNC Horticulture, candidates, working in teams, could be asked to design, plant, and maintain an ornamental area of bedding plants.

Candidate evidence requirements are:

- ◆ a plan of action
- ◆ evidence of a product, organised activity/event, or performance
- ◆ evidence that documents the processes underpinning the practical hands-on activity
- ◆ evidence showing an evaluation of the practical assignment

The assessment should be based on a combination of the end-result of the activity (the product or performance) and the carrying out of the activity (the process).

Candidates will be asked to:

- ◆ interpret the brief
- ◆ gather information to clarify the brief
- ◆ decide on a product, activity, event, or performance to develop
- ◆ select and manage materials and/or resources
- ◆ produce the product, organise the activity or event, or deliver the performance
- ◆ evaluate the product, activity/event, or performance (through feedback)

If the investigation is carried out as part of a group investigation, the specification must clearly state how individual contributions will be assessed to ensure **each** candidate has met fully the evidence requirements.

2.2 Examination-based Graded Units

Examination-based Graded Units are designed to test underpinning knowledge and theoretical understanding of a subject or occupational area. In the examination, candidates are expected to use a wide range of cognitive skills, such as recalling, explaining, distinguishing, estimating, exemplifying, interpreting, inferring, solving, calculating, analysing, evaluating, appraising, and synthesising.

All examinations should be **invigilated** and **unseen** (ie candidates should not be given the questions in advance). This allows the examination to sample from the full range of subject/occupational content.

To ensure fairness and reliability of assessment, the content sampled should cover the critical knowledge and skills (topics) specified in the Graded Unit specification in such a way as to provide direct evidence of attainment or to allow attainment to be inferred. The content of the examination should not be predictable, (ie candidates should not be able to spot the questions in advance).

NB As indicated in Section 1.2, part of a Project-based assessment might include a ‘mini’ exam.

Examinations can be either closed-book or open-book:

- ◆ A **closed-book examination** tests the ability to recall and apply knowledge and understanding. You should choose a closed-book examination where candidates are expected to be able to recall and apply knowledge without recourse to source materials. Candidates are given no information other than the question paper and script book, and are expected to answer examination questions without the aid of reference material.
- ◆ An **open-book examination** tests the ability to apply knowledge and understanding. In addition to the question paper and script book, candidates are allowed to use prescribed materials. Details of these materials must be included in the Graded Unit specification. This includes the type (eg book, notes, tables), the amount (eg one A4 side, two text books) and any named text (eg a French dictionary).

Decisions about whether to use closed-book or open-book examinations should reflect:

- ◆ what is expected of candidates in real-life working situations in the subject/occupational area
- ◆ what information we can reasonably expect candidates to know without the aid of reference material
- ◆ the knowledge and understanding that candidates are being required to retain

2.3 Selecting an assessment instrument

When choosing the most appropriate assessment instruments for Graded Units, careful consideration will have to be given to how candidates can best provide evidence that they can integrate and apply the knowledge and/or skills achieved in the individual Units.

This will involve thinking about the best way to obtain evidence of the achievement of the principal aims of the HNC and HND, which in turn involves these steps:

- ◆ identify the principal aims of the HNC or HND from the general and specific aims of the Group Award – where an HND incorporates an HNC, these should be distinct
- ◆ identify the HN Units in which candidates develop the knowledge and skills required to achieve these principal aims
- ◆ consider whether evidence generated in Unit assessments will contribute to the Graded Unit assessment (for example, a product of a Unit assessment might be reflected on or evaluated in the Graded Unit assessment)
- ◆ select the method(s) of assessment and assessment instrument that would best generate evidence that candidates have retained and can integrate the knowledge and skills to show that they have achieved the principal aims of the HNC or HND

Regardless of the method or the assessment instrument chosen, evidence that candidates produce while completing the Graded Units should confirm that they:

- ◆ can combine subject- or occupationally-related knowledge, understanding, and skills effectively
- ◆ have assimilated the main elements of the HNC or HND and are able to apply them successfully to the solution of significant problems typical of the subject/occupational area

2.4 Assessment arrangements for candidates with disabilities and/or additional support needs

Assessment arrangements are available for candidates with disabilities and/or additional support needs. These are intended to enable candidates to demonstrate their level of attainment in relation to the qualification standards. They are not intended to compensate for lack of attainment, and should not:

- ◆ give an unfair advantage to candidates
- ◆ reduce the validity and reliability of the assessment or compromise the credibility of the award

You can find full details in our publication *Guidance on Assessment Arrangements for Candidates with Disabilities and/or Additional Support Needs*, which is available on the SQA website www.sqa.org.uk.

3 Completing the Graded Unit specification

3.1 Documents

The shell documents you will use to specify your proposed Graded Unit are attached as Appendices 4 (for project-based Graded Units) and 5 (for examination-based Graded Units). As we have already said, these specifications will form part of the validation proposal.

Each of the Graded Unit specifications has five parts:

- ◆ **General information for centres.** This details general information, including the title, code, type of assessment, assessment instrument, credit value and level, purpose of the Graded Unit, recommended prior knowledge and skills requirements, Core Skills, and assessment.
- ◆ **Administrative information.** This gives details of the title, code, category, original date of publication, version, source etc.
- ◆ **Instructions for designing the assessment task and assessing candidates.** This part gives the instructions centres should follow when developing and administering the assessment instrument and using it to assess candidates and grade candidate achievement.
- ◆ **Support notes.** This part gives information to tutors on all aspects of the Graded Units including: delivery, assessment, planning, verification, timing and integration with other Units.
- ◆ **General information for candidates.** This section should give a summary of the principal aims of the Graded Unit; the broad subject areas/topics that will be covered; the type of assessment; the assessment instrument that will be used and any submission dates/timings.

3.2 General information for centres

Completing a Graded Unit specification involves giving the relevant information under all the following headings.

Title of the Graded Unit

The title of the Graded Unit should be the title of the HNC and/or HND that the Graded Unit contributes to. This will be accompanied by the number '1' to indicate that it belongs to an HNC or the first part of an HND, or by the numbers '2' and '3' to indicate that it belongs to the second part of an HND.

For example, the titles of the Graded Unit for the HNC Marketing would be:

- ◆ ‘Marketing: Graded Unit 1’

Similarly, the titles of the Graded Units in the HND Marketing would be:

- ◆ ‘Marketing: Graded Unit 1’
- ◆ ‘Marketing: Graded Unit 2’
- ◆ ‘Marketing: Graded Unit 3’

Code

Graded Unit codes are allocated by SQA. Each Graded Unit is allocated a unique code that is used to record candidate achievement and trigger certification. Once a Graded Unit has been validated and allocated a code, it cannot be significantly altered or amended in any way except through further validation processes whereupon it would be allocated another code.

Type

The Graded Unit can be either project-based or examination-based.

Assessment instrument

For **project-based** Graded Units, this will be *either*

- ◆ a case study
- or*
- ◆ an investigation
- or*
- ◆ a practical assignment

For **examination-based** Graded Units, this will be *either*

- ◆ a closed-book examination
- or*
- ◆ an open-book examination

Credit points and level

This section contains information on the notional time taken to complete the Graded Unit, and its SCQF level and credit rating.

Credit points: Like HN Units, all Graded Units are allocated a credit value that indicates the volume of achievement — 8 SCQF credit points (one SQA HN credit) indicates a notional design length of 40 hours of structured learning. Similarly, a Graded Unit of 16 SCQF credit points (two SQA HN Unit credits) indicates a notional design length of 80 hours of structured learning. Graded Units at SCQF level 7 (HNC or first part

of HND) will be designed to have 8 SCQF credit points. Graded Units at SCQF level 8 (second part of HND) can be designed to have 8 or 16 SCQF credit points, i.e. one Unit at 16 SCQF credit points or two Units at 8 SCQF credit points each.

SCQF level: Graded Units that contribute to an HNC or the first part of an HND should be designed to meet the demands of SCQF level 7. Graded Units that contribute to the second part of an HND should be designed to meet the demands of SCQF level 8 (see Appendix 3 for the level descriptors).

Graded Units at SCQF level 7 should assess mainly the knowledge and skills gained from the Units in the HNC or first part of the HND. Graded Units at SCQF level 8 should assess mainly the knowledge and skills gained from the Units in the second part of the HND.

Note: Where an HND incorporates an HNC, the level 7 and 8 Graded Units should be distinct and clear from the content of the Graded Unit Specification.

Purpose

The purpose statement should detail those principal aims of the Group Award that the Graded Unit is designed to assess. The purpose statement should not make any claims that go beyond what is assessed in the Graded Unit.

Recommended prior knowledge and skills

This statement (also known as an 'access' statement) should provide guidance on the level of knowledge and skills candidates need to be able to achieve the Graded Unit in the time allotted.

As Graded Units are designed to assess the integration of knowledge and/or skills developed through the Units making up the Group Award, this section should give guidance on which Units from the Group Award should have been undertaken by candidates before embarking on the Graded Unit.

The recommended access requirements for the Graded Unit in the HNC or first part of the HND should be made up predominantly of SCQF level 7 Units. The recommended access requirements for the Graded Unit(s) in the second part of the HND should be made up predominantly of SCQF level 8 Units.

Likewise, as Graded Units assess whether the candidate has achieved the principal aims of the Group Award, the recommended access requirements would include most of, but not necessarily all, the mandatory Units and some of the optional Units.

Core Skills

This section should give details of any opportunities (embedded or signposted) for candidates to develop Core Skills or Core Skill components. For example, project-based Graded Units may provide candidates with the opportunity to develop the Core Skill of *Problem Solving*. Further guidance on Core Skills development is given in *Guidance on Core Skills*, which can be found on the SQA website www.sqa.org.uk.

Assessment

This section is a standard SQA statement about the production of evidence by centres.

It should also indicate whether any assessment exemplars for the Graded Unit have been produced. In this case, you should include the standard statement: *An exemplar instrument of assessment and marking guidelines have been produced to indicate the national standard of achievement required at SCQF Level X.*

3.3 Administrative information

SQA will complete this part of the specification once the Graded Unit has been validated.

3.4 Instructions for designing the assessment task and assessing candidates

3.4a Project-based assessment

Conditions of Assessment

The first sub-section is the **Conditions of Assessment**. This is a three-paragraph standard statement detailing the conditions in which the assessment should take place. Qualification Design Teams can add contextualised information providing this does not contradict the information in the standard statement.

Normally, HN candidates would be expected to carry out the work involved in the project without close supervision. However, there may be reasons to have some of the project work to be carried out under invigilation (eg the writing of the evaluation report or the conduct of a laboratory experiment). You should use invigilation where the conditions of assessment contribute to the national standard and reflect the needs of end-users (such as professional body recognition requirements). You should not use invigilation solely as a means to authenticate candidates'

work — there are many other ways to do this, eg short personal interviews or witness testimony. Some project-based assessment may also incorporate a ‘mini’ exam.

When completing this section of the Graded Unit specification, Qualification Design Teams should ensure that any conditions of assessment, and in particular the use of invigilation, are necessary, meet the requirements of end-users of the qualification, and do not present any unnecessary barriers to achievement.

Instructions for designing the assessment task

The next section is called **Instructions for designing the assessment task**. This section has two parts.

- ◆ The first part gives general instructions and the three bullet points are standard statements specifying the minimum design requirements of any project-based assessment task, whether it is a case study, investigation, or practical assignment. Qualification Design Teams can provide additional information, which contextualised these statements for a specific Graded Unit.
- ◆ The second part gives specific instructions which should be contextualised by the Qualification Design Teams and which should provide further instructions specific to your HNC and/or HND, eg instructions for writing the project brief. These instructions should ensure consistency of interpretation across all centres that will offer the HNC and/or HND while not placing unnecessary restrictions on choice.

Guidance on grading candidates

The next section is called **Guidance on grading candidates**. Candidates who meet the minimum Evidence Requirements will have their achievement graded as C (competent), A (highly competent), or B (somewhere between A and C). Here are some examples of general grade-related criteria for project-based Graded Units:

Grade A	Grade C
<p>Is a seamless, coherent piece of work which:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ has sufficient evidence for the three essential phases of the project, is produced to a high standard, and is quite clearly inter-related ◆ demonstrates an accurate and insightful interpretation of the project brief 	<p>Is a co-ordinated piece of work which:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ has sufficient evidence of the three essential phases of the project, is produced to an adequate standard ◆ demonstrates an acceptable interpretation of the project brief

Grade A	Grade C
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ is highly focused and relevant to the tasks associated with the project brief ◆ is clear and well structured throughout and language used is of a high standard in terms of level, accuracy and technical content ◆ effectively consolidates and integrates required knowledge and skills ◆ demonstrates the candidate's ability to work autonomously with minimum support or revision 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ is focused and relevant to the tasks associated with the project brief ◆ is satisfactorily structured and language used is adequate in terms of level, accuracy and technical content ◆ consolidates and integrates knowledge and skills but this may lack some continuity and consistency ◆ has required additional support and revision during project

Please note that the above criteria are only examples. For example, this guidance uses generic words such as 'adequate', 'acceptable' and 'satisfactory', but each Qualification Design Team needs to define what these are for its subject area. Qualification Design Teams should tailor, contextualise and supplement these generic criteria to provide guidance to assessors on what candidate attainment at A or C would be, and include it in this section of the Graded Unit specification.

The project will be marked out of 100. Assessors will mark each stage of the project, taking into account the criteria outlined. The marks will then be aggregated to arrive at an overall mark. Assessors will then assign an overall grade to the candidate for the Graded Unit based on the following grade boundaries, which cannot be changed:

- A = 70% — 100%
- B = 60% — 69%
- C = 50% — 59%

Note: the candidate must meet all the minimum Evidence Requirements for each stage of the project to achieve the Graded Unit. Grade C must be commensurate with the minimum Evidence Requirements.

Evidence Requirements

The **Evidence Requirements** section, should detail the minimum Evidence Requirements for each of the three stages of the project (planning, developing, and evaluating). Candidates have to generate all the minimum evidence specified for each stage of the project to pass the

Graded Unit. The Qualification Design Team should agree the percentage of marks allocated to each stage of the project, eg 20% to the planning stage, 60% to the developing stage and 20% to the evaluation stage. This allocation should be consistent with the aims of the Graded Unit and Group Award. For example, if one aim is to develop planning skills, then an appropriate allocation should be made to this stage of the project.

Examples of Evidence Requirements for each type of project-based assessment instrument are given below. Again, you should tailor and contextualise this generic evidence for your own subject area. **Please note** that Validation Panels will look at how these have been tailored to specific Graded Units.

Case study Evidence Requirements

Evidence of Planning	Evidence of Developing	Evidence of Evaluating
<p><i>An Action Plan</i> that includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ the aims of the assessment task including research, development, and evaluation ◆ timescales for achieving these aims ◆ identification of those aspects of the task that require further research ◆ identification of the methods of research and sources to be used 	<p><i>A Case Study Report</i> including evidence of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ collection and collation of any further research undertaken ◆ analysing the case study scenario ◆ drawing conclusions ◆ presenting recommendations <p>The report should also include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ a contents page ◆ a list of acknowledgements of sources and references 	<p><i>An Evaluation Report</i>, which should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ briefly outline the case study ◆ review and update the action plan in light of experience ◆ assess the effectiveness of the action plan ◆ assess the effectiveness of the research methods used ◆ identify any knowledge and skills that have been gained and/or developed

Investigation Evidence Requirements

Evidence of Planning	Evidence of Developing	Evidence of Evaluating
<p><i>An Action Plan</i> that includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ the aims of the assessment task including research, development, and evaluation ◆ timescales for achieving these aims ◆ the rationale for selecting the topic to be researched, if choice has been allowed ◆ identification of the main issues for research ◆ identification of the methods of research and sources to be used 	<p><i>An Investigation Report</i>, including evidence of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ collection and collation of data ◆ interpretation/analysis of data ◆ summary of the findings and conclusions drawn <p>The report should also include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ a contents page ◆ a list of acknowledgements of sources and references 	<p><i>An Evaluation Report</i>, which should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ briefly outline the investigation ◆ review and update the action plan in light of experience ◆ summarise any unforeseen events and how they were handled ◆ identify any knowledge and skills that have been gained and/or developed ◆ assess the effectiveness of the research methods used ◆ assess the strengths and weaknesses of the main body of the investigation report ◆ determine to what extent the investigation covers the topic

Practical assignment Evidence Requirements

Evidence of Planning	Evidence of Developing	Evidence of Evaluating
<p><i>An Action Plan</i> that includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ the candidate's interpretation of the brief ◆ any information gathered to clarify the brief ◆ aims of the practical assignment ◆ identification of information sources to be used ◆ identification of materials and resources required and how they will be accessed ◆ identification of the stages involved and the timescales for completion of each stage 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ <i>Output</i> of the practical activity that meets required quality <p>and</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ <i>Record of the processes</i> underpinning the activity, eg logbook, diary 	<p><i>Evaluation Report</i>, which should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ briefly outline the assignment ◆ review and update the action plan in light of experience ◆ summarise any unforeseen events and how they were handled ◆ identify any knowledge and skills which have been gained and/or developed ◆ assess the strengths and weaknesses of the output of the practical assignment ◆ determine to what extent the assignment met the original brief

Support Notes

This section should contain information that will support lecturers on aspects such as planning, timing, delivery, assessment, Core Skills development, and resources. For example, it could include advice on how to plan within a Course Team and on the sequence of delivery of the Graded Unit in relation to the subject Units that underpin it. It might also make useful recommendations such as the use of progress interviews with candidates. This section is not mandatory and therefore can contain any other useful information, guidance or advice on the Graded Unit.

General information for candidates

This section should always start on a new page so it can be photocopied and given out to candidates at the start of the Graded Unit delivery. It should be written in simple, plain English and should include information on:

- ◆ what the Unit is about, eg principal aims
- ◆ what they have to know eg topics from underpinning Units
- ◆ how they will be assessed, ie investigation, or case study, or practical assignment
- ◆ timing of assessment, eg when will project begin, interim interviews, final submission date
- ◆ what the basis of grading achievement will be
- ◆ any opportunities to develop Core Skills, eg through particular activities

3.4b Examination-based

Conditions of Assessment

The **Conditions of Assessment** section is a standard statement detailing the conditions in which the assessment should take place. Justification for any changes to the standard statement should be discussed and confirmed during the validation process. You may wish to use this section to provide additional information specific to your HNC and HND.

Length of Examination

Normally, examinations will last three hours. However, there may be circumstances in which you wish the examination to be divided into a number of separate events. This could be where totally different skills are being tested, eg when assessing listening comprehension of a foreign language or conducting part of the assessment on-line. The reasons for holding separate examinations or having examinations that are less or more than three hours' in length will be subject to validation. You also need to ensure that the integrative aspect of the Graded Unit is not compromised.

Type of examination

Qualification Design Teams should specify whether the examination is to be closed-book or open-book. If open-book, the materials to which candidates will have access should be specified. This includes the type (eg book, notes, tables), the amount (eg one A4 side, two text books), and any named text (eg a French dictionary).

Instructions for designing the assessment task

The next section, **Instructions for designing the assessment task**, is very important as it provides the basis for the exam paper. In this section there is a table in which you will specify:

- ◆ The topics, ie the critical knowledge and skills, to be covered in the examination – this should **not** be a repetition of Unit titles but should specify the topics from within or across the Units on which

examination questions will be based. Attention should be paid to the integrative aspect of topics within the Group Award, and they way these topics help to meet the aims of the Group Award

- ◆ The level of demand for each topic, eg: description, explanation, analysis, application, calculation, etc. This part needs careful attention as the level of demand must take account of the integrative nature of the Graded Unit; the level of demand within individual Units within the Group Award; and the SCQF level of the Graded Unit.
- ◆ The relative weighting of marks to be given for each topic within the examination, eg: 40% of the marks should be allocated to Topic A, 20% to Topic B, 30% to Topic C, 10% to Topic D. The weighting should take into account the level of demand for each topic. For example, if the level of demand is identification then this would likely be given a lesser weighting than that of analysis. This allocation is important as the weighting for each topic will be the same irrespective of the number of questions that cover that topic.

In addition to the information in this table, you need to specify:

- ◆ Whether the examination must have a set number of questions, eg three extended response questions, ten multiple choice questions, etc. If this is not given, centres devising Graded Unit assessments can decide on the appropriate number of questions providing they adhere to other requirements in the Graded Unit specification. As stated above, the weighting for each topic will be important, as this will be the same irrespective of the number of questions which cover that topic.
- ◆ Further allocation of marks or weighting within each *question*, if appropriate. This might include such things as technical detail, development, analysis, drawing conclusions and integration. Where marks are allocated to integration of knowledge and understanding, the nature of integration needs to be clear as this may be different for each Group Award.

NB It is important that all the points discussed above match with each other. A worked example illustrating the five points above is given in Appendix 6.

Qualification Design Teams can use the Support Notes section of the Graded Unit specification to give further information, advice and exemplification on designing the assessment task.

Guidance on grading candidates

The next section, **Guidance on grading candidates**, is a standard statement about how candidate achievement in the examination will be graded. The examination will be marked out of 100. Assessors will aggregate the marks achieved by the candidate to arrive at an overall

mark for the examination. Assessors will then assign a grade to the candidate for this Graded Unit based on the following grade boundaries, which cannot be changed:

- ◆ A = 70% — 100%
- ◆ B = 60% — 69%
- ◆ C = 50% — 59%

Success in the examination will be based on achievement of 50% of the overall marks.

Candidates who meet the minimum criteria will have their achievement graded as C (competent), A (highly competent), or B (somewhere between A and C). Qualification Design Teams should provide the criteria for a C grade (which would be the minimum required) and for a Grade A. It is also important that these criteria match any information given in the previous section on ‘Instructions for designing the assessment task’ So, for example, if the level of demand for a topic is analysis then the C criteria should be clear what the minimum requirement would be, eg ‘must provide some analysis although conclusions may be weak’.

Here are some examples of grade-related criteria for an examination-based Graded Unit. Please note that these criteria are generic and are only examples, and Qualification Design Teams should tailor, contextualise and supplement these criteria to provide guidance on what candidate attainment at A or C would be in relation to a specific Group Award. For example, this guidance uses generic words such as ‘satisfactory’ or ‘high standard’ but each Qualification Design Team needs to define what these are for its subject area. This is important as these criteria will be used in conjunction with information given in the ‘Instructions for designing the assessment task’ to provide the basis for the marking scheme for the assessment.

Grade A	Grade C
Is a seamless, coherent piece of work or exam script, which consistently:	Is a co-ordinated piece of work or exam script that:
◆ interprets and understands the question in a way that demonstrates insight and clear understanding of issues and relationships	◆ interprets and understands the question in a way that enables the candidate to meet the basic criteria required
◆ demonstrates a comprehensive analysis and evaluation of relevant information	◆ demonstrates limited analysis, evaluation, and explanation of the question and other relevant information
◆ offers logically structured and coherently expressed responses, demonstrating consistent use of	◆ offers uneven responses that convey limited understanding although some relevant points are made

Grade A	Grade C
correct terminology	
◆ is clear and well structured throughout, with language and terminology used of a consistently high standard in terms of level, accuracy, and technical content	◆ is satisfactorily structured, with language and terminology used adequate, although not always consistent, in terms of level, accuracy, and technical content
◆ consolidates and integrates required knowledge and skills, linking concepts and ideas, and relating answers explicitly to the question	◆ consolidates and integrates knowledge and skills but may lack continuity and consistency and fail to show clear links to concepts and ideas
◆ convincingly argues and shows links between discussions and conclusions, demonstrating comprehensive knowledge and understanding as well as analysis and evaluation skills	◆ argues and justifies conclusions in an acceptable way but these conclusions may lack reasoned understanding, may not link well to discussions, and may show limited knowledge
◆ provides evidence of possible alternative approaches and arguments as well as understanding of different interpretations	◆ is likely to show only one approach and limited understanding of different interpretations

Support Notes

This section should contain information that will support lecturers on aspects such as compiling examination questions and marking instructions, planning, timing, delivery, assessment and verification, Core Skills development and resources. This section is not mandatory and, therefore, can contain any other useful information, guidance or advice on the Graded Unit.

General information for candidates

This section should always start on a new page so it can be photocopied and given out to candidates at the start of the Graded Unit delivery. It should be written in simple, plain English and should include information on:

- ◆ what the Unit is about, eg principal aims
- ◆ what they have to know eg no new knowledge and skills
- ◆ how they will be assessed, eg examination
- ◆ timing of assessment, eg end of course
- ◆ what will be the basis of grading achievement
- ◆ any opportunities to develop Core Skills

4 Developing a Project-based Graded Unit assessment

This guidance is aimed at assessors in centres who wish to develop assessments from the Graded Unit specification. An Assessment Exemplar for each Graded Unit for consortium-devised HNCs and HNDs is produced by SQA, and these can be used for assessment purposes, providing the centre can ensure the integrity, security and confidentiality of the assessment. They are available on SQA's secure website (see your SQA Co-ordinator for access). However, we hope that, over time, centres will develop their own assessment instruments — the following sections give advice and guidance on this.

4.1 Things to consider

When developing an assessment instrument, you should have a copy of the Graded Unit specification and the relevant HN Units. You should consider:

- ◆ the aims to be assessed by the Graded Unit — these are detailed in the *Purpose* section of the Graded Unit specification
- ◆ the HN Units that contribute to these aims — these are detailed in the *Recommended Prior Knowledge and Skills* section of the Graded Unit specification
- ◆ the guidance given in the *Instructions for designing the assessment task and assessing candidates* section of the Graded Unit specification, and in particular the following sub-sections:
 - conditions of assessment
 - instructions for designing the assessment task
 - Evidence Requirements

4.2 Developing the project brief: who is involved

4.2a Assessors

The Project brief should be designed by assessors who have a current knowledge of the subject/occupational area of the Group Award, the critical knowledge and skills (topics) being assessed, and the teaching and learning methods involved. This means being involved in the delivery and assessment of the Units on which the project brief will be based.

Normally, one assessor will be responsible for co-ordinating the production of the project brief, evidence requirements and instructions for grading candidates.

If more than one assessor is likely to be involved in assessing the project, then arrangements for cross-assessment should be planned in advance.

4.2b Internal verifiers

The role of the internal verifier is to ensure that the project brief accords with the Graded Unit specification.

Your role as internal verifier begins with commenting on the project brief and marking instructions. You will ensure that:

- ◆ the production of the project brief and instructions for grading candidates is in line with the centre's policy
- ◆ guidance has been issued to presenting departments, as and when appropriate, on the assessment arrangements and performance standards

You should work closely with the assessor to ensure that:

- ◆ the project brief is within the scope of the critical knowledge and/or skills being assessed
- ◆ the project brief provides adequate opportunity to distinguish between performance at A, B, C, and fail
- ◆ the project brief maintains a proper balance across the Units from which the topics being assessed are drawn
- ◆ the project brief contains no features that might disadvantage or upset specific candidates or groups of candidates
- ◆ the wording of the brief to candidates is clear
- ◆ the instructions for grading candidates will help assessors to arrive at valid and reliable assessment decisions of the candidates' performance

4.3 Developing the project brief and task instructions

When developing the project brief and task instructions, assessors should consider the following:

- ◆ The project brief (ie the case study scenario, investigation topic, or practical assignment brief) should include a list of any support materials that candidates will need to access to

undertake the assessment task. You may wish to point candidates to particular reference materials or other sources of information, eg books, articles, maps, websites, diagrams, and/or organisations.

- ◆ The assessment task should require the candidate to research or gather further information to clarify, or expand on, the information provided in the project brief. The task instructions should detail the main research methods (if any) candidates are expected to use.
- ◆ You should clearly indicate where you wish candidates to identify for themselves any additional materials and/or methods of research they will use.

4.4 Evidence Requirements

4.4a Task instructions

The task instructions should also provide guidance on the evidence to be produced. This should indicate:

- ◆ the time allowed for completion of the case study, investigation, or practical assignment
- ◆ the type of evidence to be produced for each part of the project
- ◆ the amount of evidence to be produced for each part of the project
- ◆ the standard of evidence required

4.4b Types of evidence

Each project-based assessment instrument has three stages:

- ◆ planning
- ◆ developing
- ◆ evaluating

The Graded Unit specification has been designed to take account of these three stages and specifies the minimum evidence that has to be achieved by each candidate in each stage.

See the tables in Section 3.4 for examples of the Evidence Requirements that can be detailed in the Graded Unit specification.

4.5 Instructions for grading candidate achievement

Candidates have to meet the evidence specified in each stage of the project to pass the Graded Unit. The Evidence Requirements will be included in the Graded Unit specification and will have been agreed at validation. This will vary for each HNC and HND and will be determined by the aims the Graded Unit is designed to cover.

Assessors have to judge whether candidates have met the Evidence Requirements and then decide on the overall grade to be given. If candidates have met the minimum Evidence Requirements, you should grade their achievement as C (competent), or A (highly competent), or B (somewhere between A and C).

The Graded Unit specification will give guidance on criteria that assessors can use to grade candidate performance.

See the table in Section 3.4a for examples of the type of criteria that may have been included in the Graded Unit specification.

Re-assessment

The evidence for a project-based Graded Unit is generated over time and involves three distinct stages, each of which has to be achieved before the next is undertaken. This means that any reassessment of stages must be undertaken before proceeding to the next stage. The overall grade is derived from the total number of marks *across all* sections, and should reflect the ability of the candidate to work autonomously and the amount of support required (see example of grading criteria in section 3.4a).

If a candidate fails the project or wishes to upgrade, then this must be done using a *substantially different* project, assignment, case study, etc, ie all stages are undertaken using a new project. In this case, a candidate's grade will be based on the achievement in the *re-assessment*.

5 Developing an Examination-based Graded Unit assessment

This guidance is aimed at assessors in centres who wish to develop assessments from the Graded Unit specification. An Assessment Exemplar for each Graded Unit for consortium-devised HNCs and HNDs is produced by SQA, and these can be used for assessment purposes, providing the centre can ensure the integrity, security and confidentiality of the assessment. These are available on SQA's secure website (see your SQA Co-ordinator for access). However, we hope that, over time, centres will develop their own assessment instruments and the following sections give advice and guidance on this.

5.1 Introduction

The purpose of an examination is normally to test recall, understanding, evaluation, and synthesis of knowledge, although in some cases, such as a word processing exam, it could be to test skills.

All examinations should take place under invigilated conditions. If the examination question paper is to be used with another group of candidates later, all copies should be returned to the invigilator.

All examinations should be **unseen**, ie candidates should not be given the questions in advance. This allows the examination to sample from the full range of subject/occupational content.

To ensure the fairness and reliability of assessment, the actual sample used should cover the critical knowledge and skills (topics) specified in the Graded Unit specification to provide direct evidence of attainment or to allow attainment to be inferred. The content of the examination should not be predictable, ie candidates should not be able to spot the questions in advance.

Note: You must ensure the security, integrity, and confidentiality of any SQA exemplar or commercially-produced question papers used for summative assessment of candidates.

When developing the examination, you will need a copy of the relevant validated Graded Unit specification and the relevant HN Units.

5.2 Developing the question paper: who is involved

5.2a Assessors

Examinations should be designed by assessors who have a current knowledge of the subject/occupational area of the Group Award, the critical knowledge and skills (topics) being assessed, and the teaching and learning methods involved. This means being involved in the delivery and assessment of the Units from whose content the examination questions will be drawn.

Normally, one assessor will be responsible for co-ordinating the production of an examination question paper and corresponding marking instructions, and co-ordinating the marking of candidates' scripts (ie responses to the questions).

The question paper should satisfy the requirements for the critical knowledge and/or skills (ie topics) to be assessed, the level at which they are to be assessed, and the weighting to be given to each topic that is set out in the Graded Unit specification. Over time, the revising of question papers and marking instructions should take account of the experience of previous examinations, ie any feedback gained through the internal and external verification of previous examinations.

You should check the content of all questions to determine what, if any, examination stationery is required, eg diagrams, graphics, formulae, tapes. Those devising questions should ensure they reflect the diversity and complexity of society and that content will not cause offence and does not contain any barriers to achievement.

You should also prepare instructions for departments entering candidates and for invigilators, and ensure that these agree with the requirements of the question paper.

5.2b Internal verifiers

The role of the internal verifier is to ensure that the examination accords with the Graded Unit specification. If you are an internal verifier, it is also your role to ensure that the requirements of the question paper, the instructions it gives, the materials and stationery required, and the instructions to invigilators and the invigilation arrangements, are consistent and satisfactory.

Your role begins with commenting on the question paper and marking instructions. You will ensure that:

- ◆ the setting of the question paper and marking instructions is in line with the centre's policy
- ◆ all question papers are strictly confidential from original to final printed version, and that their contents have not been divulged to any unauthorised person
- ◆ guidance has been issued to presenting departments, as and when appropriate, on the assessment arrangements and performance standards

You should work closely with the assessor to ensure that:

- ◆ the question paper is within the scope of the critical knowledge and/or skills being assessed
- ◆ the question paper provides adequate opportunity to distinguish between performance at A, B, C, and fail
- ◆ the question paper maintains a proper balance across the Units from which the topics being assessed are drawn
- ◆ the question paper contains no features that might disadvantage or upset specific candidates or groups of candidates
- ◆ the layout of the question paper is satisfactory
- ◆ the wording of questions and instructions to candidates is clear
- ◆ any diagrams, formula, graphics, etc are of satisfactory size and proportions, and are accurately reproduced
- ◆ the instructions for presenting departments and invigilators are clear and adequate
- ◆ the arrangements for the conduct of the examination are adequate — including printing and distribution of question papers and materials and invigilation
- ◆ the marking instructions will help assessors to arrive at valid and reliable assessment decisions of the candidates' performance

5.2c Scrutineers

Scrutinising the question paper before it is taken by candidates allows for any last-minute changes to be made. Your centre might wish to use scrutineers to work through the question paper much as a candidate would, to ensure that each question can be answered or solved, and to advise the assessor of any issues that have become apparent.

A scrutineer should be someone who has not been involved in either the setting of the question paper or its verification. The use of scrutineers can be particularly useful where a question paper is

being used for a large number of candidates, or where some of the questions will be used across various subject/occupational areas.

5.3 Developing the question paper — things to consider

5.3.1 The question paper

When developing a question paper, assessors should consider the following:

- ◆ the aims to be assessed by the Graded Unit
- ◆ the group of Units that most contribute to these aims
- ◆ the critical knowledge and/or skills contained in these Units

The Graded Unit specification details the topics to be covered by the examination. Using this specification, you will determine the actual questions to be answered by the candidates for each of these topics.

The number of questions may vary — one question could be sufficient to cover one topic, whereas several might be used to cover another topic. If the number of questions is not specified, you can decide on the appropriate number of questions to be included. However, the relative weighting allocated to each topic must be adhered to.

The questions must be designed to examine the level of demand specified in the Graded Unit specification, eg extended response questions can be used to examine higher-order analytical skills, while short answer questions can be used to assess recall of knowledge. It is likely that the examination will use a variety of question types.

The question paper as a whole should present a reasonable and fair opportunity for candidates of differing ability to demonstrate achievement at A, B, or C.

5.3.2 Examination instructions

The examination paper should give clear instructions to candidates. Instructions might include all/some of the following:

- ◆ the number of questions to be answered, eg all, two out of three, etc
- ◆ any mandatory or optional questions, eg Question 1 must be answered plus two from Questions 2 – 5
- ◆ if exam paper has been divided into sections, which sections and questions within sections must be answered and which are optional

- ◆ whether candidates can write on paper they provide or must do so on scripts/paper given
- ◆ the time allowed for completion
- ◆ whether the exam is closed book or open book. If the exam is open book then precise details of what candidates can bring into the exam must be given.
- ◆ any other instructions, eg handing in notes or intermediate workings

5.4 Developing marking instructions

Marking instructions for each paper should be drawn up at the time the exam paper is developed. Each examination will have an overall mark of 100.

The marking instructions will be based on information in the Graded Unit specification. This will include the level of demand and weighting required for each topic. The level of demand may vary from topic to topic. The weighting will also vary for each HNC and HND — it will be determined by the aims that the Graded Unit is designed to cover. The assessor will determine the maximum number of marks to be allocated to each of the questions designed to cover each topic. The sum of these marks should not exceed the overall weighting specified for each topic.

The marking instruction should also detail the evidence (ie points to be covered) that the candidate is required to produce in his or her responses to each question to achieve a pass. The marking instructions, like the question paper, should provide ‘headroom’ for candidates to demonstrate attainment beyond pass — they should give a clear indication of the maximum potential marks for each question and what is required to achieve them.

The level of demand and grading criteria given in the Graded Unit specification should also be used as a benchmark for allocating marks to achieve a pass and attainment beyond pass. For example, if the level of demand for a topic is analysis, and the grading criteria for a C is that candidate must give both strengths and weaknesses, and for an A must also make a strong link to the topic, then both strengths and weaknesses must be given to attain the minimum mark and higher marks would be given for those that made a strong link to the topic.

You may wish to use the checklist overleaf when designing, checking, and finalising the question paper, marking instructions, and examination instructions.

Note: Though this checklist is extensive, it is not exhaustive.

Examination checklist for assessors and internal verifiers

Area	Checklist point	Yes	No
Coverage	Does the question paper, taken as a whole, match the Graded Unit specification?		
	Is there as much integration as is reasonable to expect in the subject/occupational area? (NB the question paper, as a whole, should allow candidates to demonstrate integration of knowledge; there is no need for each question to test integration of knowledge.)		
	Is there a correct balance/coverage of knowledge/problem solving; or particular skills, or different themes/content areas?		
	Does the sample provide a systematic, but non-predictable coverage; are all the main areas of knowledge and skills sampled to avoid question spotting?		
	Does the question paper, as a whole, present a reasonable and fair opportunity for candidates of differing ability to demonstrate achievement at A, B, or C?		
Questions	Is there a range of level of demand across the questions and is this range appropriate to the level of the Graded Unit?		
	Are questions structured appropriately?		
	Where structured questions are used, do easier parts appear first?		
	Are questions that depend on a correct answer to a previous part generally avoided? If essential, do the marking instructions avoid a double penalty, ie not penalise the candidate for the same error more than once?		
	Is the ordering of questions appropriate?		
	Are the individual questions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ valid, ie testing what they are meant to be testing? ◆ at the appropriate level of demand? ◆ clearly worded — unlikely to confuse a well-prepared candidate? ◆ laid out clearly? 		
	Do the questions allow scope to distinguish between A, B, and C gradings?		
	Do the questions avoid negative experiences for all candidates, irrespective of gender, ethnicity, social background, etc?		
	Are all instructions (eg use of diagrams, formulae) clear?		
	Are diagrams used only where they are essential and/or helpful?		
Layout	Is the layout appropriate? Is it likely to be supportive to the candidate?		

Area	Checklist point	Yes	No
Layout cont'd	Has a consistent style ie font, typographical features, use of margins been used?		
	Are any diagrams used of the right size and in the most suitable position?		
	Have any copyright issues that have arisen been addressed?		
Examination Instruction	Have examination instructions been given?		
	Are instructions clear in terms of number of questions, mandatory/optional questions, sections, timing, open or closed book, exam scripts, other information?		
Marking Instructions	Are the marking instructions fit for purpose, comprehensive and accurate?		
	Do they give all possible correct answers/all possible categories of correct answers/examples of types of responses worth particular marks or whatever is appropriate to the subject matter?		
	Are they likely to support reliable marking? Depending on types of questions do they contain: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ all possible acceptable answers? ◆ all possible categories of acceptable answers? ◆ examples of acceptable answers or categories of acceptable answers? ◆ scope to distinguish between A, B, C and fail? 		
	Is the open or closed nature of the examination reflected in the marking instructions?		
	Are the marks appropriately allocated to each question, ie what is the relative importance of the various parts?		
	Does the allocation of marks match the guidance on weighting given in the Graded Unit specification?		

5.5 Internal verification of the question paper

Once the draft question paper and marking instructions have been developed, they should be subject to internal verification or other quality checks. If this is the first time you have produced a Graded Unit question paper, you are strongly advised to have it prior verified by SQA.

5.6 Assessing candidates' scripts and grading achievement

When marking the examination, the assessor will decide on the precise mark to be given for candidates' answers to each of the questions. The marks will then be aggregated to arrive at an overall mark for the examination. After the marking of any script, the number of marks awarded for each candidate should be totalled and checked. The assessor will then assign a grade to each candidate for the Graded Unit based on the following grade boundaries:

A = 70% — 100%
B = 60% — 69%
C = 50% — 59%

Success in the examination will be based on 50% of the overall marks. Candidates who fail to achieve 50% or above will not achieve the Graded Unit. Also see Section 3.4b for further guidance on grade criteria.

5.7 Internal verification of marking

The internal verification process ensures that all candidates have been fairly treated; that the assessment has been valid and reliable; and that the assessment decisions, marks, and grades allocated are fair and in accordance with national standards. A suggested method for the internal verification of the marking process is for the internal verifier to:

- ◆ select and check a sample of scripts marked by the assessor — the sample should include A, B and C grades and fails
- ◆ decide whether the marking is:
 - at the appropriate standard
 - generally lenient, and by how much
 - generally severe, and by how much
 - lenient or severe at a particular point in the marks range, and by how much
 - inconsistent
- ◆ discuss any problem cases with the assessor and agree on appropriate adjustments to be made to the sampled scripts and, if necessary, to other scripts marked by the assessor
- ◆ complete the documentation that underpins any further action required
- ◆ make a judgement on the type of training/guidance/support to offer the assessor

6 External verification

6.1 Submitting candidate evidence to SQA

All Graded Units will be subject to external verification by SQA. This means that SQA verifiers will sample candidate evidence from Graded Units for all HNCs and HNDs from all centres. Where candidate evidence is transportable, we will use a combination of central and postal verification. In other cases, we will use visiting verification. Many Graded Units will lend themselves to central verification. Where materials have to be sent to SQA for external verification, we will provide the necessary packaging materials.

SQA's Assessment Standards: Verification will notify centres of:

- ◆ the candidates whose evidence will be sampled during the verification event
- ◆ the materials that the verifiers will look at
- ◆ the submission date for materials to be sent for central verification or the date on which a verifier will visit the centre

Materials required for the verification event

The materials that the verifiers will look at during the verification event will include some or all of the following:

- ◆ the assessment instruments developed by your centre:
 - the case study scenario and assessment instructions
 - the investigation topic and assessment instructions
 - the practical assignment brief and assessment instructions
 - question paper
- ◆ the accompanying marking instructions
- ◆ evidence for a sample of candidates chosen by SQA

For project-based assessment instruments, candidate evidence will include:

- ◆ the action plan
- ◆ case study report, investigation report or any underpinning evidence or evidence generated during the hands-on practical work of the practical assignment
- ◆ evaluation report

For examination-based assessment instruments, candidate evidence will include:

- ◆ candidate scripts

There is more information about external verification in the publications *Verification Visits: A guide for centres* and the *Guide to Assessment and Quality Assurance for Colleges of Further Education*.

Both guides are available on our website **www.sqa.org.uk**.

Appendix 1: 2003 HN Design Principles

To continue to uphold the tradition of Higher National Certificates and Diplomas as the leading qualifications for technician, technologist and first line management occupations, qualification design teams should adhere to the design principles and develop or revise qualifications which ensure the continuing fitness for purpose of those qualifications.

It should be noted, however, that these are principles rather than rules and are designed to ensure that all HNC/Ds are developed and validated to a consistently high standard. Therefore, where market research, particularly among candidates and employers, clearly indicates that any design principle needs to be re-interpreted or modified, SQA will work with the qualification design team to develop alternatives, which are coherent with the other principles. In particular, this applies to those marked with an asterisk. Any re-interpretation or modification of design principles needs to be indicated and negotiated at the outset of development. Design principles cannot be challenged at the point of validation.

The validity of the market research and the fitness for purpose of the proposed alternatives will be confirmed at validation.

Further considerations for qualification design teams are also indicated.

a Design principles

SCQF level and credit points

- 1 HNCs shall be designed to be at SCQF level 7 and shall comprise 96 SCQF credit points.
- 2 HNDs shall be designed to be at SCQF level 8 and shall comprise 240 SCQF credit points.
- 3 HNCs should incorporate at least 48 SCQF credit points at SCQF level 7.
- 4 HNDs should incorporate at least 64 SCQF credit points at SCQF level 8.

Core Skills

- 5 HNC and HND programmes shall incorporate opportunities for candidates to develop Core Skills.

- 6 *HNCs and HNDs should clearly include opportunities for candidates to develop Core Skills to levels required by the occupations or progression pathways the HNs support. This would mean all five Core Skills should be developed in every HN programme.

Mandatory Section

- 7 *HNCs should include a mandatory section of at least 48 SCQF credit points including a Graded Unit. (See Principles 9 and 10 under '*Graded Units*' below).
- 8 *HNDs should include a mandatory section of at least 96 SCQF credit points, including Graded Units.

Graded Units

- 9 *HNCs should include one Graded Unit of 8 SCQF credit points at SCQF level 7.
- 10 *HNDs should include one Graded Unit of 8 SCQF credit points at SCQF level 7, plus 16 SCQF credit points of Graded Unit(s) at SCQF level 8.

The purposes of Graded Units are to assess the candidate's ability to integrate and apply the knowledge and/ or skills gained in the individual HN Units to demonstrate that they have the principal aims of the Group Award, and grade candidate achievement.

b Further considerations

HN Unit and Graded Unit Specifications

SQA produces guidance on how to write HN Unit and Graded Unit Specifications. These include templates and examples of how the specifications should be laid out. This guidance should always be used in developing new or revised HN Unit or Graded Unit Specifications. The minimum change to current Unit specifications would be to remove the merit statement and to add an SCQF level and SCQF credit points.

Validation of HN Unit Specifications

A key part of validation is to confirm the proposed allocation of SCQF levels and SCQF credit points to each Unit, and this needs to be seen to be done consistently. Until the process of devolving this to centres is fully worked out, SQA will validate all new or revised HN Unit specifications. Centres may continue to develop HN Unit specifications for validation by SQA.

Validation of HN Group Awards and Graded Units

Group award validation may continue to be done by those centres with devolved powers to do so. As Graded Units relate to the principle aims of a Group Award, these too may be validated by devolved centres as part of Group Awards.

Validation periods

HN Units, Graded Units and Group Awards will be kept under review by design teams in order to ensure continuing fitness for purpose. Normally, these will be reviewed every five years or more frequently if recommended by validation panels. However, specific time periods of validation will not be specified.

Appendix 2: SQA qualifications and the SCQF

The Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) has been developed by a Partnership composed of: the Quality Assurance Agency for higher education (QAA), the Scottish Executive, the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) and Universities Scotland.

The SCQF brings Scottish qualifications into a single framework of 12 levels ranging from SQA Access 1 to Doctorates. The SCQF includes degrees; HNCs and HNDs; SQA National Qualifications; and SVQs.

The levels of the Framework occupied by SQA qualifications are as follows:

SCQF level	National Qualification level	Higher National level	SVQ level
12*			
11*			SVQ 5
10*			
9*			
8*		HND	SVQ 4
7*	Advanced Higher	HNC	
6	Higher		SVQ 3
5	Intermediate 2		SVQ 2
4	Intermediate 1		SVQ 1
3	Access 3		
2	Access 2		
1	Access 1		
* Levels 7 to 12 contain the 6 levels of Scottish degree studies			

Each SQA Unit is allocated a number of SCQF credit points at a specific level. One point equates to ten hours of notional learning.

The SCQF is intended to make the overall system of Scottish qualifications easier to understand by making the relationships between qualifications clear. It should also make it easier to establish links between qualifications and make it easier for learners to transfer credit from one course of study to another.

Appendix 3 — SCQF level descriptors

SCQF Level 8 — (SHE level 2, Dip HE, HND, SVQ 4 are examples of qualifications at this level)

NB: The descriptors set out the characteristic generic outcomes of each level. They are intended to provide a general, shared understanding of each level and to allow broad comparisons to be made between qualifications and learning at different levels. They are not intended to give precise or comprehensive statements and there is no expectation that every qualification or programme should have all of the characteristics. The descriptors have been developed through a series of consultations and are offered as a first working guide and will be revised in the light of feedback on their use.

Knowledge and Understanding	Practice: Applied knowledge and understanding	Generic Cognitive Skills	Communication, ICT and numeracy skills	Autonomy, accountability and working with others
Characteristic outcomes of learning at each level include the ability to:				
<p>Demonstrate and/or work with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ a broad knowledge of the scope, defining features, and main areas of a subject/discipline ◆ detailed knowledge in some areas ◆ understanding of a limited range of core theories, principles and concepts ◆ limited knowledge and understanding of some major current issues and specialisms ◆ an outline knowledge and understanding of research and equivalent scholarly/academic processes 	<p>Use a range of routine skills, techniques, practices and/or materials associated with a subject/discipline, a few of which are advanced or complex.</p> <p>Carry out routine lines of enquiry, development or investigation into professional level problems and issues.</p> <p>Adapt routine practices in accepted standards.</p>	<p>Undertake critical analysis, evaluation and/or synthesis of ideas, concepts, information, and issues that are in the common understandings of the subject/discipline.</p> <p>Use a range of approaches to formulate evidence-based solutions/responses to defined and/or routine problems/issues.</p> <p>Critically evaluate evidence-based solutions/responses to defined and/or routine problems/issues.</p>	<p>Use a range of routine skills and some advanced and specialised skills associated with a subject/discipline, for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ convey complex information to a range of audiences and for a range of purposes ◆ use a range of standard applications to process and obtain data ◆ use and evaluate numerical and graphical data to measure progress and achieve goals/targets 	<p>Exercise autonomy and initiative in some activities at a professional level.</p> <p>Take significant managerial or supervisory responsibility for the work of others in defined areas of work.</p> <p>Manage resources in defined areas of work.</p> <p>Take the lead on planning in familiar or defined contexts.</p> <p>Take continuing account of own and others' roles, responsibilities and contributions in carrying out and evaluating tasks.</p> <p>Work in support of current professional practice under guidance.</p> <p>Deal with ethical and professional issues in accordance with current professional and/or ethical codes or practices under guidance.</p>

SCQF level 7 — (SHE level 1, Cert HE, HNC, Advanced Higher are examples of qualifications at this level)

NB: The descriptors set out the characteristic generic outcomes of each level. They are intended to provide a general, shared understanding of each level and to allow broad comparisons to be made between qualifications and learning at different levels. They are not intended to give precise or comprehensive statements and there is no expectation that every qualification or programme should have all of the characteristics. The descriptors have been developed through a series of consultations and are offered as a first working guide and will be revised in the light of feedback on their use.

Knowledge and Understanding	Practice: Applied knowledge and understanding	Generic Cognitive Skills	Communication, ICT and numeracy skills	Autonomy, accountability and working with others
Characteristic outcomes of learning at each level include the ability to:				
<p>Demonstrate and/or work with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ a broad knowledge of the subject/discipline in general ◆ knowledge that is embedded in the main theories, concepts and principles ◆ an awareness of the evolving/changing nature of knowledge and understanding ◆ an understanding of the difference between explanations based in evidence and/or research and other forms of explanation and of the importance of this difference 	<p>Use some of the basic and routine professional skills, techniques, practices and/or materials associated with a subject/discipline.</p> <p>Practise these in both routine and non-routine contexts.</p>	<p>Present and evaluate arguments, information, and ideas that are routine to the subject/discipline.</p> <p>Use a range of approaches to addressing defined and/or routine problems and issues in familiar contexts.</p>	<p>Use a wide range of routine skills and some advanced skills associated with the subject/discipline — for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ convey complex ideas in well-structured and coherent form ◆ use a range of forms of communication effectively in both familiar and new contexts ◆ use standard applications to process and obtain a variety of information and data ◆ use a range of numerical and graphical skills in combination ◆ use numerical and graphical data to measure progress and achieve goals/targets 	<p>Exercise some initiative and independence in carrying out defined activities at a professional level.</p> <p>Take supervision in less familiar areas of work.</p> <p>Take some managerial responsibility for the work of others in a defined and supervised structure.</p> <p>Manage limited resources in defined areas of work.</p> <p>Take the lead in implementing agreed plans in familiar or defined contexts.</p> <p>Take account of own and others' roles and responsibilities in carrying out and evaluating tasks.</p> <p>Work with others in support of current professional practice under guidance.</p>

Appendix 4: Higher National Graded Unit Specification (Project)

Higher National Graded Unit Specification

General Information for Centres

This Graded Unit has been validated as part of the (*insert title*). Centres are required to develop the assessment instrument in accordance with this validated specification. Centres wishing to use another type of Graded Unit or assessment instrument are required to submit proposals detailing the justification for change for validation.

Graded Unit Title:

Graded Unit Code:

Type of Graded Unit: Project

Assessment Instrument:

Credit points and level: HN Credit(s) at SCQF level *: (X SCQF credit points at SCQF level *)

*SCQF credit points are used to allocate credit to qualifications in the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF). Each qualification in the Framework is allocated a number of SCQF credit points at an SCQF level. There are 12 SCQF levels, ranging from Access 1 to Doctorates.

Purpose: This Graded Unit is designed to provide evidence that the candidate has achieved the following principal aims of the (*insert title*):

Recommended Prior Knowledge and Skills: It is recommended that the candidate should have completed or be in the process of completing the following Units relating to the above specific aims prior to undertaking this Graded Unit:

General Information for Centres (cont)

Core Skills: (One of the following statements should be used)

Where a claim for an embedded Core Skill has been validated, a standard statement will be added by SQA.

‘The achievement of this Unit gives automatic certification of the following:
(*give Core Skill, or component, title and level*)’

Where Core Skills development is signposted, use the wording:

‘There are opportunities to develop the Core Skill(s) of (*give Core Skill, or component, title + level*) in this Unit, although there is no automatic certification of Core Skills or Core Skills components.’

Where Core Skills are both embedded and signposted, use the wording:

‘The achievement of this Unit gives automatic certification of the following:
(*give Core Skill, or component, title and level*). There are also further opportunities to develop the Core Skill(s) of (*give Core Skill, or component, title + level*) in this Unit.’

Where no Core Skills are either embedded or signposted, the following statement will be used:

‘There are no opportunities to develop Core Skills in this Unit.’

Assessment: This Graded Unit will be assessed by the use of (*insert assessment instrument*). The developed (***insert assessment instrument***) should provide the candidate with the opportunity to produce evidence that demonstrates she/he has met the aims of the Graded Unit that it covers.

Administrative Information

Graded Unit Code:

Graded Unit Title:

Original date of publication:

Version:

History of Changes:

Version	Description of change	Date

Source: SQA

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Higher National Graded Unit Specification: Instructions for designing the assessment task and assessing candidates

Graded Unit Title:

Conditions of Assessment

The candidate should be given a date for completion of the (*insert assessment instrument*). However, the instructions for the assessment task should be distributed to allow the candidate sufficient time to assimilate the details and carry out the assessment task. During the time between the distribution of the assessment task instructions and the completion date, assessors may answer questions, provide clarification, guidance and reasonable assistance. The assessment task should be marked as soon as possible after the completion date. The final grading given should reflect the quality of the candidate's evidence at the time of the completion date.

The evidence for the project is generated over time and involves three distinct stages, where each stage has to be achieved before the next is undertaken. Thus any reassessment of stages must be undertaken before proceeding to the next stage.

If a candidate fails the project overall or wishes to upgrade, then this must be done using a *substantially different* project, ie all stages are undertaken using a new project, assignment, case study, etc. In this case, a candidate's grade will be based on the achievement in the *reassessment*.

Instructions for designing the assessment task

The assessment task is a project. The project undertaken by the candidate must be a complex task which involves:

- ◆ variables which are complex or unfamiliar
- ◆ relationships which need to be clarified
- ◆ a context which may be familiar or unfamiliar to the candidate

The assessment task must require the candidate to:

- ◆ analyse the task and decide on a course of action for undertaking the project
- ◆ plan and organise work and carry it through to completion
- ◆ reflect on what has been done and draw conclusions for the future
- ◆ produce evidence of meeting the aims which this Graded Unit has been designed to cover

Guidance on grading candidates

Candidates who meet the minimum Evidence Requirements will have their achievement graded as C — competent, or A — highly competent or B somewhere between A and C. The grade related criteria to be used to judge candidate performance for this Graded Unit is specified in the following table.

Grade A	Grade C
Is a seamless, coherent piece of work which: ◆ ◆ ◆ ◆ ◆ ◆	Is a co-ordinated piece of work which: ◆ ◆ ◆ ◆ ◆ ◆

The project will be marked out of 100. Assessors will mark each stage of the project, taking into account the criteria outlined. The marks will then be aggregated to arrive at an overall mark for the project. Assessors will then assign an overall grade to the candidate for this graded unit based on the following grade boundaries.

A = 70% — 100%

B = 60% — 69%

C = 50% — 59%

Note: the candidate must achieve all of the minimum evidence specified below for each stage of the project in order to achieve the Graded Unit.

Evidence Requirements

The project consists of three stages: planning; developing; and evaluating. The following table specifies the minimum evidence required to pass each stage.

Note: The candidate must achieve **all of the minimum evidence** specified below for each stage of the project in order to pass the Graded Unit.

Project Stage	Minimum Evidence Requirements
Stage 1 — Planning	<p><i>The candidate must achieve all of the minimum evidence specified above in order to pass the Planning stage.</i></p>
Stage 2 — Developing	<p><i>The candidate must achieve all of the minimum evidence specified above in order to pass the Developing stage.</i></p>
Stage 3 — Evaluating	<p><i>The candidate must achieve all of the minimum evidence specified above in order to pass the Evaluating stage.</i></p>

Higher National Graded Unit specification: Instructions for designing the assessment task and assessing candidates (cont)

Support Notes

Candidates with Disabilities and/or Additional Support Needs

The additional support needs of individual candidates should be taken into account when planning learning experiences, selecting assessment instruments or considering special alternative assessment arrangements. For information on these, please refer to the SQA document *Guidance on Assessment Arrangements for Candidates with Disabilities and/or Additional Support Needs*, which is available on SQA's website: www.sqa.org.uk.

General Information for Candidates

Appendix 5: Higher National Graded Unit Specification (Examination)

Higher National Graded Unit Specification

General Information for Centres

This Graded Unit has been validated as part of the *(insert title)*. Centres are required to develop the assessment instrument in accordance with this validated specification. Centres wishing to use another type of Graded Unit or assessment instrument are required to submit proposals detailing the justification for change for validation.

Graded Unit Title:

Graded Unit Code:

Type of Graded Unit: Examination

Assessment Instrument:

Credit points and level: HN Credit(s) at SCQF level *: (X SCQF credit points at SCQF level *)

**SCQF credit points are used to allocate credit to qualifications in the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF). Each qualification in the Framework is allocated a number of SCQF credit points at an SCQF level. There are 12 SCQF levels, ranging from Access 1 to Doctorates.*

Purpose: This Graded Unit is designed to provide evidence that the candidate has achieved the following principal aims of the *(insert title)*:

Recommended Prior Knowledge and Skills: It is recommended that the candidate should have completed or be in the process of completing the following Units relating to these specific aims prior to undertaking this Graded Unit:

Core Skills: There are no Core Skills embedded in this Graded Unit specification.

General Information for Centres (cont)

Assessment: This examination-based Graded Unit is (*insert assessment instrument*). It will consist of a written examination of three hours.

Administrative Information

Graded Unit Code:

Graded Unit Title:

Original date of publication:

Version:

History of Changes:

Version	Description of change	Date

Source: SQA

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Higher National Graded Unit specification: Instructions for designing the assessment task and assessing candidates

Graded Unit Title:

Conditions of Assessment

The assessment is based on a (*insert assessment instrument*) examination lasting three hours.

If a candidate does not achieve a pass or if a candidate wishes to upgrade, this must be based on a significantly different examination from that given originally. A candidate's grade will be based on his/her achievement on the new event using a significantly different examination.

The examination should be unseen and the assessment should be conducted in controlled and invigilated conditions.

At all times, the security, integrity and confidentiality of examinations must be ensured.

Instructions for designing the assessment task:

The examination should be designed to assess the candidate's critical knowledge and understanding of the topics relating to the specific aims which this Graded Unit is designed to cover. The questions and corresponding marks should be designed in accordance with the ranges indicated in the table that follows. However, the overall total mark for the examination is 100.

Key Topics	Level of demand	Percentage weighting for each topic

The examination will be marked out of 100. Assessors will aggregate the marks achieved by the candidate to arrive at an overall mark for the examination. Assessors will then assign a grade to the candidate for this Graded Unit based on the following grade boundaries:

- ◆ A = 70% — 100%
- ◆ B = 60% — 69%
- ◆ C = 50% — 59%

Higher National Graded Unit specification: Instructions for designing the assessment task and assessing candidates (cont)

Candidates who meet the minimum Evidence Requirements will have their achievement graded as a C (competent), A (highly competent), or B (somewhere between A and C). The grade related criteria to be used to judge candidate performance for this Graded Unit is specified in the following table:

Grade A	Grade C
Is a seamless, coherent piece of work or exam script which consistently: ♦ ♦ ♦ ♦ ♦ ♦	Is a co-ordinated piece of work or exam script which: ♦ ♦ ♦ ♦ ♦ ♦

Higher National Graded Unit specification: Instructions for designing the assessment task and assessing candidates (cont)

Support Notes

Candidates with Disabilities and/or Additional Support Needs

The additional support needs of individual candidates should be taken into account when planning learning experiences, selecting assessment instruments or considering special alternative assessment arrangements. For information on these, please refer to the SQA document *Guidance on Assessment Arrangements for Candidates with Disabilities and/or Additional Support Needs*, which is available on SQA's website: www.sqa.org.uk.

General information for candidates

Appendix 6

Exemplar — HND in Tax Inspection (This is not a ‘real’ qualification)

This exemplar has been developed to illustrate:

- ◆ How the aims of the Group Award inform the topics for the Graded Unit exam.
- ◆ How to ensure coherence in sections within ‘Instructions for designing the assessment task’ in the Graded Unit specification.
- ◆ How to ensure coherence between the sections ‘Instructions for designing the assessment task’ and Guidance on grading candidates’ in the Graded Unit specification.

Aims of the HND will enable candidates:

- ◆ to develop skills in analysing situations and choosing appropriate solutions in relation to tax issues
- ◆ to develop knowledge and skills in assessing claims
- ◆ to have a broad understanding of the principles underlying tax law
- ◆ to develop suitable competencies to carry out work within the tax advice industry
- ◆ to develop suitable competencies to enhance an administrative or managerial career in this occupational area.

Instructions for designing the assessment task

Topic	Level of demand	Percentage weighting to this topic
Role of a tax adviser	Description. This must include the role of the adviser in relation to clients in public and private businesses. The use of technical terms will be expected.	10%
Situations requiring tax advice and action	Analysis and application. This must include weighing up relative options in situations and linking appropriate advice and action to a situation. Justification for giving particular advice must be given.	60%
Legislative and rule requirements and applications	Explanation and application. This requires details of the relevant legislation and rule requirements to be given and	20%

	relevant application. Reasons for applying particular legislation must be given.	
Types of tax calculations	Evaluation. This must include three different types of calculations and the strengths and weaknesses of each type must be given together with a justification for choosing each type in a particular situation.	10%

Topics requiring lower level skills such as description and explanation could be assessed using short answer questions or restricted response questions and those requiring application, evaluation and analysis could be assessed using extended response questions.

Under the column ‘Level of demand’ it is clear where there is integration *within* topics. So, for example, Topic 2 asks for analysis and application, and Topic 3 asks for explanation and application. However, it is also important to make clear if integration is required between topics. This could be done by setting out clear instructions for questions (see examples below) or by simply stating this in text form.

Please note that what is also important here is that to gain a pass mark of 50, candidates would need to include analysis to gain the minimum requirement of 50%. This would ensure the high order skills (fulfilling the SCQF level 8 requirement) have been demonstrated.

So, you could have an exam paper with:

Example 1

- ◆ two short answer questions of 5 marks each to look at description
- ◆ three extended response questions of 30 marks each to look at explanation, application, evaluation and analysis

Within the question, there could be further allocation of marks and instructions on integration.

So, for example, in this exam paper you could say.

- ◆ No integration is necessary for topic 1 and other topics (therefore you could have 2 questions on description).
- ◆ Topics 2, 3 and 4 will be integrated (therefore the 3 extended response questions must integrate the analysis of a situation with an explanation of why a particular piece of legislation/rule should be applied/is relevant and a justification for the use of a particular type of tax calculation). Within each question, marks should be allocated on the basis of analysis, links between the situation and

solution, developed points, conclusions and the way the candidate has addressed the question.

Or you could have an exam paper with

Example 2

- ◆ two short answer questions of 5 marks each to look at description
- ◆ one restricted response question of 10 marks to look at explanation
- ◆ two extended response questions of 25 marks to look at analysis and application and evaluation
- ◆ one extended response questions of 30 marks to look at analysis, application and explanation.

Within the question, there could be further allocation of marks and instructions on integration.

So, for example, in this exam paper you could say.

- ◆ No integration is necessary for topic 1 and other topics (therefore you could have two short answer questions on description).
- ◆ Only some integration is necessary for topic 3 and other topics (therefore you could have one restricted response question on explanation).
- ◆ Some integration of topic 2 and topic 4 (therefore could have two extended response questions on analysis, application and evaluation).
- ◆ Some integration of topics 2, 3 and 4 (therefore could have one extended response question to integrate analysis, application, explanation and evaluation) Within each question, marks should be allocated on the basis of analysis, links between the situation and solution, developed points, conclusions and the way the candidate has addressed the question.

Guidance on grading candidates

Candidates who meet the minimum Evidence Requirements will have their achievement graded as C (competent), A (highly competent), or B (somewhere between A and C). Grading criteria should be set for A and C. Assessors will then assign a grade to the candidate for this Graded Unit based on the following grade boundaries, which cannot be changed:

- ◆ A = 70% — 100%
- ◆ B = 60% — 69%
- ◆ C = 50% — 59%

Grading criteria should reflect the information in the 'Instructions for designing the assessment task'.

So, for example, for this exam:

Grade A	Grade C
Is a seamless, coherent piece of work or exam script, which consistently:	Is a co-ordinated piece of work or exam script that:
◆ interprets and understands the question in a way that demonstrates insight and clear understanding of issues	◆ interprets and understands the question in a way that enables the candidate to meet the basic criteria required for topic and level of demand
◆ gives reasoned explanations, which are always supported by consistently strong evidence	◆ gives explanations and provides supporting evidence but strength of evidence varies.
◆ offers logically structured and coherently expressed responses and consistently uses correct terminology	◆ responses are factually correct and uses correct terminology.
◆ demonstrates a comprehensive analysis of relevant information, by using underlying principles	◆ identifies strengths and weaknesses and advantages and disadvantages in any analysis
◆ demonstrates an understanding of the relationship between a situation and a range of solutions and can justify the choice of one solution over another	◆ demonstrates an understanding of a situation and is able to offer a justifiable solution.
◆ draws logical conclusions firmly-based on evidence presented in answers.	◆ draws conclusions but these may be only partially supported by evidence presented in answers.

Feedback Form

Guidance on Graded Units

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