

Guidance on group award Graded Units:

Using the design principles for Higher National Certificates and Diplomas

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Part A: Introduction and overview

Introduction

About group award Graded Units

Following an extensive consultation process which included piloting new design principles, the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) agreed (in March 2003) design principles for HNCs and HNDs that will address current concerns. All HN Units will be benchmarked against the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) levels and associated credit points. Our guidance on credit values of HNCs and HNDs has been amended so that all represent a similar level of challenge to candidates.

All HNCs and HNDs will have a number of group award Graded Units. These are a means of ensuring that candidates have achieved the principal aims of an HNC or HND. They do this by assessing the integration of knowledge and skills developed across the individual Units which make up the group award. This is not new — many HNCs and HNDs already have strong integrative elements, such as projects — but, by introducing group award Graded Units, we are extending this good practice to all HNCs and HNDs.

Group award Graded Units will also 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 all those 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 group award Graded Units. It should help:

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

Note: SCQF credits

We have tried to use SCQF terminology throughout this guide in preference to HN credit terms. One SQA HN credit is equivalent to 8 SCQF credit points. For further information on the SCQF see Appendix 2 or visit its website at www.scqf.org.uk.

1 The design principles for HNCs and HNDs

1.1 The design principles

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 described here.

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 here) need to be re-interpreted or modified, SQA will work with the qualification design team to develop alternatives that are coherent with the other principles. The validity of the market research and the fitness for purpose of the proposed alternatives will be confirmed at validation.

The design principles are summarised in Appendix 1. The main changes are:

SCQF level and SCQF credit points

- ◆ Without exception, HNCs will be designed to be at SCQF level 7 and will have 96 SCQF credit points. HNDs will be designed to be at SCQF level 8 and will have 240 SCQF credit points. This means that in future all HNCs will be the same size, as will all HNDs.
- ◆ All HN Units will be allocated to a level appropriate to their position in the SCQF to confirm and strengthen the position of HNCs and HNDs as higher education qualifications and to maintain and improve progression to appropriate employment, professional body qualifications and degree programmes. HN Units, and group award Graded Units will be allocated to a level during the development or review process, and this will be subject to validation.
- ◆ HNCs should incorporate at least 48 SCQF credit points at SCQF level 7 and HNDs should incorporate at least 64 SCQF credit points at SCQF level 8.

There is more about the SCQF and level descriptors in Appendices 2 and 3.

Group award Graded Units

- ◆ *HNCs should normally include one group award Graded Unit of 8 SCQF credit points at SCQF level 7.
- ◆ *HNDs should normally include one group award Graded Unit of 8 SCQF credit points at SCQF level 7 plus 16 SCQF credit points of group award Graded Unit(s) at SCQF level 8.
- ◆ The group award Graded Units will be included in the 96 and 240 SCQF credit points required for HNCs and HNDs respectively.

The purposes of group award 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.

Mandatory section

- ◆ All HNCs and HNDs will have a mandatory section that every candidate will take. For HNCs, this will be a minimum of 48 SCQF credit points, including the group award Graded Unit.
- ◆ For HNDs, it will be a minimum of 96 SCQF credit points, including the group award Graded Units.

Core Skills

- ◆ To meet employment and progression needs, all HNC and/or HND programmes will incorporate opportunities for candidates develop Core Skills.
- ◆ *HNCs and HNDs should clearly include opportunities for candidates to develop Core Skills to the levels required by the occupations or progression pathways the HNCs and HNDs support. This would normally mean all five Core Skills should be developed in every HN programme.

1.2 Further considerations

Revised HN Unit specification

SQA produces guidance on how to write HN Unit and group award 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 group award Graded Unit specifications. The minimum change to current HN Unit specifications would be to remove the merit statements (with the agreement of all users) 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 the Unit to an SCQF level and to confirm the proposed allocation of SCQF credit points to the Unit. This needs 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, though only distinctive HN Units from specialist centres will normally be considered.

Validation of HNCs and HNDs and group award Graded Units

Group award validation may continue to be done by those centres with devolved authority. As group award Graded Units relate to the principal aims of a group award, these too may be validated by devolved centres. An important part of HNC and HND validation will be to confirm the levels of all five Core Skills needed for progression and the availability of opportunities for candidates to develop the appropriate Core Skills in the proposed HNC or HND.

Validation periods

HN Units, group award Graded Units and group awards will be kept under review by qualification design teams to ensure their 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.

1.3 Transition programme

SQA is committed to having all HN qualifications allocated to an SCQF level and given a SCQF credit rating by 2008. A timetable for achieving this for consortium-devised HNCs and HNDs will be agreed by stakeholders by August 2003, and it will involve all consortium-devised HNCs and HNDs being incorporated in the SCQF by 2006.

Note: Consortium-devised HNCs and HNDs are those developments or revisions undertaken by a group of centres in partnership with SQA

For HNCs and HNDs devised by specialist centres, timescales will be agreed with the centres by December 2003. All specialist centre-devised HNCs and HNDs should be incorporated in the SCQF by 2008.

Note: Specialist-centre-devised HNCs and HNDs are those developments or revisions led by a single centre or small group of centres who provide knowledge and skill in a specialist area. Like consortium-devised HNCs and HNDs, these development or revisions will also be supported by SQA.

In order to achieve these dates, no existing HNC and/or HND should be revised or extended according to the old (1988) design rules with a validation date that takes it beyond July 2008.

1.4 Working with the design principles

Although people developing HNCs and HNDs are required to work to nationally-agreed design principles, they still have many tasks to perform to ensure that each qualification is fit for purpose. For example:

- ◆ carrying out market research to ensure that the aims of the group award meet the needs of employment and progression
- ◆ defining the general structure of the group award and deciding on the mandatory and optional knowledge and skills
- ◆ selecting HN Units that will allow candidates to develop the knowledge, understanding and skills necessary to achieve the aims of the group award
- ◆ writing new Units where HN Units are unavailable, or revising existing HN Units, assigning them proposed credit values, and levels and submitting them for validation by SQA
- ◆ recommending appropriate approaches to assessment for each HN Unit
- ◆ incorporating opportunities for candidates to develop Core Skills which will address the needs of the employment or progression pathways
- ◆ choosing the method of assessment and type of assessment instrument for the group award Graded Units
- ◆ designing appropriate approaches to assessment for individual Units or groups of Units

1.5 Group award Graded Units

Under the 2003 design principles, all HNCs and HNDs will be assessed by a combination of Unit assessments and integrative assessment of the group award using group award Graded Units. Group award 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

2 Group award Graded Units: an overview

2.1 Purpose

The purposes of group award Graded Units are to:

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

The qualification design team will need to identify the general aims and specific aims of the HNC or HND.

General aims

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

All HNCs and HNDs have aims which specify the knowledge or skills which candidates have to attain to be deemed competent in the subject/occupational area. Examples 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

2.2 Types and instruments of assessment

There are two types of assessment which can be used for group award Graded Units — a project or an examination (but see note below). 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 most group award 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. See Section 3 for further detail on alternative methods.

Documentation

The types of assessment, and the assessment instrument to be used for the group award 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 group award Graded Unit — see Appendices 4 and 5 for the shell documents which 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 group award Graded Unit
- ◆ guidance on the designing the assessment instrument and assessing and grading candidates including any conditions of assessment to be followed

See Section 4 for guidance for qualification design teams on how to complete the group award Graded Unit specification.

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

See Sections 5 and 6 for guidance on developing and administering the assessment instrument.

2.3 Quality assurance of group award Graded Units

2.3.1 Validation

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

Guidelines for validating HNCs and HNDs using the design principles can be found in our *Validation panel member's guide: Using the design principles for Higher National Certificates and Diplomas* (CA1466/2, August 2003). There is more information about our current practices in the *Guide to Assessment and Quality Assurance for Colleges of Further Education* (AA0841/3). Both guides are also available on our website www.sqa.org.uk.

2.3.2 Moderation

Group award Graded Units are internally assessed. By this, we mean that it will be assessors in the centre who:

- ◆ develop and administer the assessment instrument in accordance with the group award 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 moderation processes
- ◆ subject to external moderation by SQA

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

SQA moderators will sample evidence from group award Graded Units for all HNCs and HNDs from all centres.

There is more information about our external moderation process in section 7.

Part B: Guidance for qualification design teams

3 Selecting the type of group award Graded Unit and instruments of assessment

3.1 Project-based group award Graded Units

Project-based group award 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 fits centres' resources and 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 group award Graded Units can take the form of a case study, investigation or practical assignment.

3.1a 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.

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

3.1b 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

3.1c 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, eg 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 or organised activity/event or a 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 or activity/event or performance (through feedback)

3.2 Examination-based group award Graded Units

Examination-based group award 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, synthesising etc.

Only **written** examinations should be used for HNC and HND group award Graded Units¹. 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 fairness and reliability of assessment, the sample should cover the critical knowledge and skills (topics) specified in the group award 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.

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

- ◆ A **closed-book examination** tests the ability to recall and apply knowledge and understanding. A closed-book examination should be selected 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 the prescribed materials must be included in the group award Graded Unit specification.

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 which candidates are being required to retain

3.3 Selecting an assessment instrument

When choosing the most appropriate assessment instruments for group award Graded Units, you will need to consider carefully how candidates can best provide evidence that they can integrate and apply the knowledge and/or skills achieved in the individual Units.

¹ Modern Languages exams may include a speaking activity.

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
- ◆ 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 group award Graded Unit assessment (for example, a written or other product of a Unit assessment might be reflected on or evaluated in the group award 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 and HND

Regardless of the method or the assessment instrument chosen, evidence that candidates produce while completing the group award 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 and HND and are able to apply them successfully to the solution of significant problems typical of the subject/occupational area

3.4

Special assessment and certification arrangements

Special assessment and certification arrangements can be applied to all SQA qualifications. Special assessment arrangements 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
- ◆ mislead users of SQA certificates about candidates' attainment

Candidates with a physical disability, a sensory impairment, a specific learning difficulty, or a temporary disability at the time of the assessment may be eligible for special assessment arrangements.

Where special assessment arrangements are applied, this may be recorded on the certificate issued.

There are full details in our publication *Guidance on Special Assessment Arrangements* (AA0645/3, December 2001).

4 Completing the group award Graded Unit specification

4.1 Documents

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

Each of the group award Graded Unit specifications has three parts:

- ◆ **General information for centres.** This details general information, including the purpose of the group award Graded Unit, the principal aims which it is designed to assess, and the recommended prior knowledge and skills requirements.
- ◆ **Administrative information.** This gives details of the title, code, category, date of publication and source etc.
- ◆ **Instructions for designing the assessment task and assessing and grading 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.

4.2 General information for centres

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

Title of the group award Graded Unit

The title of the group award Graded Unit should be the title of the HNC and/or HND that the group award 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 group award Graded Unit for the HNC Marketing would be:

- ◆ 'Marketing: group award Graded Unit 1'

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

- ◆ 'Marketing: group award Graded Unit 1'
- ◆ 'Marketing: group award Graded Unit 2'
- ◆ 'Marketing: group award Graded Unit 3'

Code

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

Type

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

Assessment instrument

For project-based group award Graded Units, this will be a case study, investigation or practical assignment. For examination-based group award Graded Units, it will be either a closed-book examination or an open-book examination.

Credit value

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

Credit value: Like HN Units, all group award Graded Units are allocated a credit value which indicates the volume of achievement — a credit value of 8 SCQF credit points (one SQA HN credit) indicates a notional design length of 40 hours of structured learning. Similarly, a group award Graded Unit of 16 SCQF credit points (two SQA HN Unit credits) indicates a notional design length of 80 hours of structured learning. group award Graded Units at SCQF level 7 (HNC or first part of HND) will be designed to have 8 SCQF credit points. group award Graded Units at SCQF level 8 (second part of HND) can be designed to have 8 or 16 SCQF credit points.

SCQF level: group award Graded Units which contribute to an HNC or the first part of an HND should be designed to meet the demands of SCQF level 7. group award Graded Units which contribute to the second part of an HND should be designed to meet the demands of SCQF level 8 (see Appendices 2 and 3 for the level descriptors).

Group award 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. group award Graded Units at SCQF level 8 should assess mainly the knowledge and skills gained from the Units in the second part of the HND.

Purpose

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

As group award 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 prior to embarking on the group award Graded Unit.

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

Likewise, as group award 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 signpost any opportunities for candidates to develop a Core Skill or Core Skill component. For example, project-based group award Graded Units may provide candidates with the opportunity to develop the Core Skill of *Problem Solving*.

Assessment

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

This section should also indicate whether any assessment exemplars for the group award 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.*

4.3 Administrative information

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

4.4 Instructions for designing the assessment task and assessing candidates

4.4a Project-based

The first sub-section in this section is **Conditions of Assessment**. This is a statement detailing the conditions in which the assessment should take place.

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 invigilated conditions, (eg the writing of the evaluation report or the conduct of a laboratory experiment). Invigilated conditions should 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). Invigilated conditions should not be used solely as a means to authenticate candidates' work — there are many other ways to do this, eg short personal interviews or witness testimony.

When completing this section of the group award Graded Unit specification, qualification design teams should ensure that any conditions of assessment, and in particular the use of invigilated conditions, 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 is a standard statement specifying the minimum design requirements of any project-based assessment task, whether it is a Case Study, Investigation or Practical Assignment.

In completing this section, qualification design teams 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 who will offer the HNC and/or HND whilst 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). Examples of grade related criteria for project-based group award Graded Units are given in the table below:

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

Grade A	Grade C
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ demonstrates an accurate and insightful interpretation of the project brief ◆ 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 	<p>interpretation of the project brief</p> <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

You should tailor 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 group award Graded Unit specification.

Evidence Requirements

The final section, **Evidence Requirements**, 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 group award Graded Unit.

Examples of Evidence Requirements for each type of project-based assessment instrument are given below. Again, you should tailor this generic evidence for your own subject area.

Case study Evidence Requirements

Evidence of Planning	Evidence of Developing	Evidence of Evaluating
<p>An Action Plan which 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 which require further research. ◆ Identification of the methods of research and sources to be used. 	<p>A Case Study Report 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>An Evaluation Report 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 which have been gained and/or developed

Investigation Evidence Requirements

Evidence of Planning	Evidence of Developing	Evidence of Evaluating
<p><i>An Action Plan</i> which 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 which 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> which 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 which meets required quality <p>And</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ <i>Written 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

4.4b

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.

Normally, examinations will last three hours. However, there may be some circumstances where the examination should 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 which are less or more than three hours' duration will be subject to validation.

Qualifications design teams should also specify whether the examination is to be closed-book or open-book. If open-book, you should specify the materials to which candidates will have access.

Instructions for designing the assessment task

In the next section, **Instructions for designing the assessment task**, 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 taken from a single Unit or from across a number of Units on which examination questions will be based
- ◆ the level of knowledge and understanding for each topic, eg explanation, analysis
- ◆ the weighting to be given for each topic in the examination, eg:
 - 40% of the questions should cover Topic A
 - 30% of the questions should cover Topic B
 - 15% of the questions should cover Topic C
 - 15% of the questions should cover Topic D
- ◆ the mark allocation to be given for each topic — the overall mark for the examination being 100

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 group award Graded Unit based on the following grade boundaries:

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

Normally, success in the examination will be based on achievement of 50% of the overall marks. However, you may want to specify achievement of a minimum number of marks for some or all of the topics. If so, this will be discussed during the validation process.

Part C: Guidance for assessors and internal moderators

5 Developing a group award Graded Unit assessment (project-based)

5.1 Things to consider

When developing an assessment instrument, assessors and internal moderators should have a copy of the group award Graded Unit specification and the relevant HN Units. You should consider:

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

5.2 Developing the project brief and task instructions

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

Support materials and research

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.

5.3 Evidence Requirements

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

Types of evidence

Each project-based assessment instrument has three stages: **planning**, **developing**, and **evaluating**. The assessment specification has been designed to take account of these three stages and specifies the minimum evidence which has to be achieved by each candidate in each stage.

See the tables in Section 4 (page 21) for examples of the Evidence Requirements that can be detailed in the group award Graded Unit specification.

5.4 Grading candidate achievement instructions

Candidates have to meet the evidence specified in each stage of the project to pass the group award Graded Unit. The Evidence Requirements will be included in the group award 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 which the group award Graded Unit is designed to cover.

You 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 group award Graded Unit specification will give guidance on criteria which assessors can use to grade candidate performance.

See the table on page 20 for examples of the type of criteria which may have been included in the group award Graded Unit specification.

6 Developing a group award Graded Unit assessment (examination-based)

6.1 Introduction

The purpose of an examination is normally to test recall, understanding, evaluation and synthesis of knowledge.

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

Only **written** examinations should be used for HNC and HND group award Graded Units (except where there are speaking tests in a Modern Languages examination). 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 group award Graded Unit specification in such a way as to provide direct evidence of attainment or to allow attainment to be inferred. That is, the content of the examination should not be predictable, ie candidates should not be able to spot the questions in advance.

Note: This excludes the possibility of using SQA exemplar or other commercially produced question papers for the summative assessment of candidates. It would also exclude re-using question papers for different groups of candidates or in different years. In short, no question paper should be used on more than one occasion, unless its security is guaranteed.

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

6.2 Developing the question paper: who is involved

6.2a 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 group award 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 moderation 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 etc. You should also prepare instructions for departments entering candidates and for invigilators, and ensure that these agree with the requirements of the question paper.

6.2b

Internal moderators

The role of the internal moderator is to ensure that the examination accords with the group award Graded Unit specification. It is also his/her 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 being assessed
- ◆ the question paper contains no features which 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 are clear
- ◆ any diagrams, formula, graphics etc, are of satisfactory size and proportions, and they 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

6.2c

Scrutineers

Scrutiny of the question paper before it is taken by candidates allows for any last-minute changes to be made before it is produced in bulk. 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 moderation. 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.

6.3

Developing the question paper — things to consider

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

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

The group award 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. The questions must be designed to examine the level of knowledge specified in the group award 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.

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 moderators

Area	Checklist point	Yes	No
Coverage	Does the question paper, taken as a whole, match the group award 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 group award Graded Unit?		
	Are questions structured appropriately?		
	Where structured questions are used, is there an incline of difficulty with easier parts first?		
	Are questions which 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, formula) 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?		
	Has a consistent style been used, ie font, typographical features, use of margins?		
	Are any diagrams used of the right size and in the most suitable position?		
	Have any copyright issues been addressed?		

Area	Checklist point	Yes	No
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 group award Graded Unit specification?		

6.4 Developing marking instructions

Each examination will have an overall mark of 100. The weighting for each topic will be given in the group award Graded Unit specification, and will vary for each HNC and HND — it will be determined by the aims which the group award 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 instructions should detail the evidence (ie points to be covered) that the candidate is required to produce in his/her responses to each of the questions. 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.

6.5 Internal moderation of the question paper

Once the draft question paper and marking instructions have been developed, they should be subject to internal moderation or other quality checks. You may also consider having it prior moderated by SQA, if this is the first time you have produced such a group award Graded Unit question paper.

6.6 Assessing candidates’ scripts

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 for each stage 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 group award Graded Unit based on the following grade boundaries:

A = 70% – 100%

B = 60% – 69%

C = 50% – 59%

Candidates who fail to achieve 50% or above will not achieve the group award Graded Unit.

6.7 Internal moderation of the marking process

The internal moderation 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 moderation of the marking process is for the internal moderator 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 which underpins any further action required
- ◆ make a judgement on the type of training/guidance/support to offer the assessor

7 External moderation

7.1 Submitting candidate evidence to SQA

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

SQA's Assessment Moderation Unit will notify centres of:

- ◆ the candidates whose evidence will be sampled during the moderation event
- ◆ the materials which the moderators will look at
- ◆ the submission date for materials to be sent for central moderation or the date on which a moderator will visit the centre

Materials required for the moderation event

The materials that the moderators will look at during the moderation 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 our external moderation process in the publications *External Assessment Moderation for National Qualifications and Higher National Qualifications: A guide for centres* (AA0892/2, December 2001) and the *Guide to Assessment and Quality Assurance for Colleges of Further Education* (AA0841/3, September 2003).

Appendix 1: Summary of the design principles for developing HNCs and HNDs

HNCs and HNDs have supported technician, technologist and first line manager occupations for over 75 years, including progression in professional qualifications and other higher education awards. More recently, some HNC and HNDs have been specifically designed to support progression from Modern Apprenticeships and to degrees.

In order to continue serving these occupations, HN qualification design teams should adhere to the following design principles. Qualification design teams must always conduct market research, particularly among candidates and employers to ensure the continuing fitness for purpose of the HN qualifications. Where this clearly indicates that any of those design principles marked with an asterisk 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.

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 normally 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 credits points including a group award Graded Unit. (See Principles 9 and 10 under 'group award Graded Units' below).
- 8 HNDs should include a mandatory section of at least 96 SCQF points, including group award Graded Units.

Group award Graded Units

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

The purposes of group award 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 group award Graded Unit specifications

SQA produces guidance on how to write HN Unit and group award 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 group award 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 group award group award Graded Units

Group award validation may continue to be done by those centres with devolved powers to do so. As group award 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, group award 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 and a wide range of other organisations.

The SCQF is a 12-level framework designed to include everything from Access 1 Units to PhDs. It brings all SQA qualifications (National Qualifications, Higher National Qualifications and SVQs) into a single unified framework along with qualifications offered by Scottish Universities.

The levels of the Framework occupied by SQA qualifications are:

SCQF level	National Qualification level	HN level	SVQ level
1	Access 1		
2	Access 2		
3	Access 3		
4	Intermediate 1		SVQ 1
5	Intermediate 2		SVQ 2
6	Higher		SVQ 3
7*	Advanced Higher	HNC	
8*		HND	SVQ 4
9*			
10*			
11*			SVQ 5
12*			

* Levels 7 to 12 contain the 5 levels of Scottish degree studies

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. Each SQA Unit is allocated a number of SCQF credit points at a specific level. One point equates to ten hours of notional learning. HN candidates are normally expected to input a further number of hours, matched to the credit value of the Unit, of non-contact time or candidate-led effort to consolidate and reinforce learning. This therefore means each HN Unit has 8 SCQF credit points.

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. Over the next few years SQA will increasingly adopt the use of SCQF levels and credit points to describe its qualifications.

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 nor 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
<p>Characteristic outcomes of learning at each level include the ability to:</p> <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 which 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 nor 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
<p>Characteristic outcomes of learning at each level include the ability to:</p> <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 which 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 group award Graded Unit Specification (Project)

General Information for Centres

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

Group award Graded Unit Title:

Group award Graded Unit Code:

Type of group award Graded Unit: Project

Assessment Instrument:

Credit value: HN Credit(s) at SCQF level: (SCQF credit points at SCQF level)

SCQF (the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework) brings Scottish qualifications into a single framework of 12 levels ranging from SQA Access 1 to doctorates. The SCQF includes degrees; HNC/Ds; SQA National Qualifications; and SVQs. Each SQA Unit is allocated a number of SCQF credit points at a specific level. 1 SCQF point = 10 hours of learning. HN candidates are normally expected to input a further number of hours, matched to the credit value of the Unit, of non-contact time or candidate-led effort to consolidate and reinforce learning.

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

General Information for Centres (cont)

Core Skills: There is no automatic certification of Core Skills or a Core Skill component as part of this group award Graded Unit. However, there may be opportunities to develop the Core Skill of Problem Solving.

Assessment: This group award group award Graded Unit will be assessed by the use of (*insert assessment instrument*). The “fleshed-out” (*insert assessment instrument*) should provide the candidate with the opportunity to produce evidence that demonstrates she/he has met the aims of the group award that this group award group award Graded Unit covers.

Administrative Information

Group award Graded Unit Code:

Group award Graded Unit Title:

Date of publication:

Source:

Special Needs: This group award Graded Unit specification is intended to ensure that there are no artificial barriers to learning or assessment. Special 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 Special Assessment Arrangements* (December 2001, AA0645/3).

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

Group award 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, and 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. Re-assessment of this group award Graded Unit should be based on a significantly different assessment task.

At this level, candidates should work independently. It is up to Centres to take reasonable steps to ensure that the project is the work of the candidate. For example, Centres may wish to informally question candidates at various stages on their knowledge and understanding of the project on which they have embarked. Centres should ensure that where research etc, is carried out in other establishments or under the supervision of others that the candidate does not receive undue assistance.

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 group award group award 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 group award Graded Unit is specified in the following table.

Instructions for designing the assessment task and assessing candidates (cont)

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

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 group award group award Graded Unit.

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

Appendix 5: Higher National group award Graded Unit Specification (Examination)

General Information for Centres

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

Group award Graded Unit Title:

Group award Graded Unit Code:

Type of group award Graded Unit: Examination

Assessment Instrument:

Credit value: HN Credit(s) at SCQF level: (SCQF credit points at SCQF level)

SCQF (the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework) brings Scottish qualifications into a single framework of 12 levels ranging from SQA Access 1 to doctorates. The SCQF includes degrees; HNC/Ds; SQA National Qualifications; and SVQs. Each SQA Unit is allocated a number of SCQF credit points at a specific level. 1 SCQF point = 10 hours of learning. HN candidates are normally expected to input a further number of hours, matched to the credit value of the Unit, of non-contact time or candidate-led effort to consolidate and reinforce learning.

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

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

General Information for Centres (cont)

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

Administrative Information

Group award Graded Unit Code:

Group award Graded Unit Title:

Date of publication:

Source:

Special Needs: This group award Graded Unit specification is intended to ensure that there are no artificial barriers to learning or assessment. Special 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 Special Assessment Arrangements* (December 2001, AA0645/3).

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

Group award Graded Unit Title:

Conditions of Assessment:

The assessment is based on a (*insert assessment instrument*) written examination lasting three hours. The grade given will reflect the candidate's achievement on the first assessment event. A candidate may wish to retake the group award group award Graded Unit but this should be based on a significantly different examination.

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

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 group award group award 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.

Topic	Level of knowledge/ understanding	Weighting/ Mark Allocation

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 group award group award Graded Unit based on the following grade boundaries:

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

Feedback Form

Guidance on group award Graded Units

Your name:

Job title:

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How useful do you find this guide?

Can you highlight any particular benefits to you in having access to this guide?

Is there any way(s) in which you would like to see this guide improved?

General points you would like to make:

Thank you for taking the time to provide us with your comments.

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