

Research and Information Services

Monitoring Standards Report



## **HNC/HND Business (G7DA)**

## Introduction

SQA has been carrying out an annual monitoring standards programme since 1998. The exercise plays a very important role in ensuring that we continue to offer qualifications of a consistently high standard. The process involves scrutinising candidate evidence, assessment material and marking guidelines for the current year and comparing these with archived evidence from a previous year's exercise where available, to judge if standards are being maintained over time. Centres with candidates taking the units in the current sample are asked to submit the work of two candidates who have been awarded a bare pass and whose evidence as far as possible exemplifies the standard for the qualification. HN unit specifications for both the current and comparator years are made available to the scrutiny teams. The panels are chaired by the Senior Verifier (mostly) and the other two members of each group are an experienced verifier and where possible an external specialist from Higher Education or an expert from industry or related sector. The Units scrutinised were:

- ◆ DE3D 34 Managing People and Organisations
- ◆ DE3K 35 Information and Communication Technology in Business
- ◆ DE3A 34 Economic Issues: An Introduction
- ◆ DE3G 35 Micro and Macro Theory and Application

### 1 Source documents

This is the first occasion that Units from the revised HND Business framework have been selected for the monitoring standards process. A significant number of centres from across Scotland submitted candidate evidence and associated documentation for scrutiny by the Panel.

Many topics covered in the new framework are broadly similar to those in the previous one, but the topics have often been updated and some are grouped differently within the revised Units.

When the new framework was devised, the Units were levelled against either SCQF level 7 or level 8. The Units aim to provide candidates with an appropriate skill base to facilitate progression to the workplace, higher education, or other studies. From the materials reviewed it appears that candidates are, in general, well prepared to follow any of these routes of progression.

Candidates are asked to undertake a wide range of assessment tasks across the mandatory and optional Units, including more extensive use of IT in a

business context. The introduction of Graded Units has been a significant change compared to the old framework. These Units allow candidates to gain a grade with passes graded at A, B or C for each of the Graded Units. This change has been accompanied by the abolition of the award of a merit pass that could previously be awarded for suitable performance within the old Units.

## **2 Assessment instruments**

In all four Units monitored, the vast majority of centres have used the assessment exemplars produced by SQA. The use of assessment exemplar instruments has a number of advantages, not least in assisting in applying a common standard more uniformly. Candidates in different geographical areas at different centres are, in effect, on a level playing field, and the use of exemplar assessments has undoubtedly saved considerable effort and resources.

Not all exemplars have instruments for re-assessment and only a few centres have supplied a set of alternative assessments. There is little evidence that exemplar assessments, re-assessment instruments, or assessments adapted from exemplars, have undergone a thorough internal verification process or, where appropriate, through prior verification. This could have taken place in the past and not been recorded on the more recent verification records that were submitted. There are deficiencies within some exemplars and only a few centres have identified these and taken corrective action.

The use of exemplar assessments has almost certainly reduced the level of integration that might otherwise have been evident. There were examples of integration where an assessment covered more than one Outcome within a Unit, but no examples of integration across Units.

Many centres did not provide information on how the conditions of assessment or the criteria for a pass were communicated to the candidates. Whilst conditions and criteria are available in the specification and exemplar for each Unit, it was unclear in many cases how candidates were informed of these. It is hoped that this information was provided to candidates verbally, but this essential information should be provided in writing. Some centres added this to the assessments, and a few provided information sheets.

In general, for assessing Units at SCQF levels 7 and 8, the assessment instruments that have been used are sufficiently demanding, but with the proviso that some issues and weaknesses exist in some exemplars. Centres must take care in studying the Unit specifications and assessing whether the assessments are suitable, regardless of whether they are from an exemplar or are self-devised.

### **3 Evidence of candidate performance**

As requested, most centres that submitted scripts provided candidate evidence for those candidates that had ‘barely passed’ the Unit. The submissions allowed the panel to judge the general performance of these candidates.

The evidence presented by centres was of a relatively uniform and appropriate standard. There were a few cases where the standards had not been appropriately judged but these were rare. There were cases of responses to individual questions that were incorrectly judged as acceptable, but their occurrence tended to be sporadic without a discernable pattern and might reasonably be expected in a substantial monitoring exercise. The frequency of these instances was judged to be within the bounds of acceptability in this exercise.

The widespread use of SQA exemplars undoubtedly assisted in the adoption of a relatively consistent standard, but this must be read along with the recognition that some exemplars contain weaknesses. The strengths of using exemplar assessments should not discourage or preclude centres from creating their own assessments, or from creating adaptations based upon exemplar assessments. In such instances, prior verification is strongly recommended.

Almost all centres submitted evidence recording the internal verification of candidate evidence. There was surprisingly little recorded evidence of any disagreement or discussion between assessors and internal verifiers relating to the judgement of the candidate evidence. This is surprising because the majority of evidence submitted was for candidates judged to have a ‘bare pass’ — the very type of candidates where disagreements/debate over a result are most likely to occur. It might be expected that where a pass was marginal, or some debate occurred, that a brief record would be made of this.

There was widespread use of remediation and less evidence of the use of complete re-assessment. There were varying degrees of remediation used with no common standard between centres as to what was (or was not) acceptable, and there were few examples identifying the point at which a candidate should be re-assessed in entirety rather than remediated. The evidence of remediation was often clear and satisfactory but there were cases where it appeared superficial, and in a small number of cases there was no real evidence that remediation had taken place.

The presentation of candidate material was largely judged as satisfactory, with there being limited scope for it being better, due to the nature of the assessments and the assessment conditions.

The quality of feedback to candidates tended to be good, with some examples of very good feedback. In a very few examples there was no written feedback and no real evidence that candidate work had been assessed other than for the addition of 'pass' being written at the top of a script. Constructive comments and feedback is valuable for candidates, particularly where comments are written. It was appreciated that some centres will feedback verbally.

It is the view of the panel that, overall, the decisions made by centres regarding the judgement of standards was acceptable and appropriate, but the issue of variable remediation does weaken the basis upon which some candidate evidence has been assessed as meeting the appropriate standard. In a very small number of cases the interpretation and judgement of the standards was not appropriate.

#### **4 Comparing standards over time**

A direct comparison between current Units and those in the comparator year 2004 was not possible. A general comparison was made against candidate evidence from Units contained within the old framework. The panel concluded that standards demanded are generally slightly higher in some components within the new Units. This is often due to the wording used in the knowledge and/or skills and evidence requirements sections.

The levelling of the new Units has also had an impact on the raising of the standards required. Some Units in the old award lacked the differentiation in the standard required at HND compared to HNC.

It was felt that the widespread use of exemplar assessments (or adaptations), has assisted in the identification of an appropriate standard and led to a greater uniformity in the application of that standard. The cost of the exemplars has perhaps been a tendency to reduce the amount of integration and a move away from centres developing their own assessments.

#### **5 Conclusions**

The general conclusion of the panel was that the new framework appears to be upholding standards at SCQF levels 7 and 8, assisting candidates with progression into higher education or other studies, and into employment.

The provision of assessment exemplars by SQA has meant that there is less variation between centres in interpreting standards. There is evidence that the provision of exemplars has been accompanied by a degree of complacency by some centres as to an exemplar's suitability and correctness. In several cases assessments were used that had become

outdated by changes to a Unit specification. In some centres additional assessment instruments have been developed, either from scratch, or based upon the exemplar materials. This is encouraging — but is attached with the strong proviso relating to satisfactory internal verification and prior verification. Staff development in assessment writing would be beneficial, and careful scrutiny of exemplars prior to their use is essential.

Included in the recommendations for centres section of the report, is the recommendation regarding the communication of assessment conditions and the criteria required for a pass. The panel can only assume that some centres are providing this information verbally, as it is not recorded on the assessment instruments which are provided to candidates, or that it is provided in information sheets. This information is important in ensuring that candidates are in no doubt as to the conditions that apply to each assessment event, and also the criteria that they must meet in order to achieve each Outcome.

Care should be taken to ensure that conditions of assessment adhere to the requirements of the Unit specification. In two Units (DE3A 34 and DE3D 34) there are differences between the conditions noted in the exemplars and the Unit specifications.

Centres are reminded that the overriding standard is established in the Unit specification and not the exemplar, and that the individual exemplar instruments of assessment commonly do not contain this information.

The overall conclusion of the Panel is that centres are largely interpreting and applying the standards acceptably, but issues relating to remediation/re-assessment, feedback, and internal verification need to be addressed. A considerable effort has been made by centres and their staff in interpreting and applying the standards and the Panel recognises this effort.

## **6 Recommendations for centres**

- ◆ It is recommended that centres continue to work to improve standards of assessment, including:
  - ◆ Providing appropriate feedback for candidates
  - ◆ Ensuring that internal verification procedures are in place.
  - ◆ Disseminating information from SQA to all appropriate staff

## **7 Recommendations for SQA**

- ◆ SQA should investigate ways in which it can further assist centres in developing more assessments.

### **Initial Response**

We will discuss the recommendations with the Business Qualifications Support Team to consider what action should be taken within available sources.

# Appendix: Unit report

## 1 The Units

Unit	Main Purpose	Candidate Profile	Uptake
<p><b>DE3D :</b> <b>Managing People and Organisations</b></p>	<p>This Unit helps candidates to develop an understanding of different approaches to managing organisations in dynamic and complex business environments.</p>	<p>The Unit is primarily intended for candidates who are likely to pursue a career in business. The Unit has relevance to people entering a diverse variety of occupations and for those continuing onto further study.</p>	<p>All centres that offer this award will offer these Units, which are designated as core Units within the HND Business. The award is a popular one and offered by a significant number of centres within Scotland. In addition, the award is approved at some centres outside Scotland.</p>
<p><b>DE3K:</b> <b>Information and Communication Technology in Business</b></p>	<p>This Unit is designed to allow candidates to develop competence in identifying, evaluating, managing and presenting business decision-making. Candidates have to consider the role of innovation in the decision-making process, evaluate data communication systems and other ICT innovations, use project management concepts and software, and use software presentation tools.</p>	<p>The Unit is intended for candidates who are likely to pursue a career in a diverse range of business occupations. The Unit also has relevance for those continuing on to further study.</p>	<p>All centres that offer this award will offer these Units, which are designated as core Units within the HND Business. The award is a popular one and offered by a significant number of centres within Scotland. In addition, the award is approved at some centres outside Scotland.</p>
<p><b>DE3A:</b> <b>Economic Issues an Introduction</b></p>	<p>This Unit introduces candidates to basic issues within economics. Topics covered include the basic economic problem and how this might be addressed. The Unit also covers how markets operate and why markets might fail, and theory</p>	<p>The Unit is primarily intended for candidates who are likely to pursue a career in business. The Unit has relevance to people entering a diverse variety of occupations which may include those working in the public and voluntary sectors, and those</p>	<p>All centres that offer this award will offer these Units, which are designated as core Units within the HND Business. The award is a popular one and offered by a significant number of centres within Scotland. In addition, the award is approved at some centres outside Scotland.</p>

	relating to National Income.	continuing on to further study.	
<b>DE3G: Economics 1: Micro and Macro Theory and Application</b>	<p>This Unit builds on a candidate's introduction to economics and exposes them to micro-economic and macro-economic applications of theory. This allows the introduction of current issues in economics and provides the candidate with an opportunity to analyse and evaluate them. Topics covered include the market structure within which a firm operates, impact of unemployment, inflation and the government use of revenue and expenditure.</p>	<p>This Unit is regarded as the second Unit in economics and is primarily intended for candidates who are likely to pursue a career in business. The Unit has relevance to people entering a diverse variety of occupations and for those continuing on to further study.</p>	

## 2 Assessment instruments

<b>DE3D: Managing People and Organisations</b>	
<b>Fitness for purpose/ integration</b>	<p>Overall, the assessment content and loading is appropriate for candidates working at SCQF level 7.</p> <p>Although the majority of centres were using an SQA exemplar, in a significant number of cases Outcomes 1–3 were being assessed without taking account of the latest SQA assessment guidance for this Unit.</p> <p>There was little evidence of integration, with only one college integrating Outcomes 2–4 in the report. Unfortunately, this meant that cutting scores could not be applied to Outcomes 2 and 3 and therefore was inappropriate for the requirements set out in the revised specification.</p>
<b>Quality of presentation</b>	<p>This was generally of an acceptable standard, though some centres had submitted closed-book work that had been word processed. These pieces of work may have been from candidates with learning needs, but as all closed-book work for both candidates in these centres was word processed this is unlikely.</p>
<b>Level of demand</b>	<p>The level of demand was appropriate for SCQF level 7, when assessments were administered correctly. In a small number of cases it was clear from candidates' notes that they had prior knowledge of the sample Evidence Requirements that would be sought in the assessment. In these cases candidates were assessed at a lower level than SCQF level 7.</p>
<b>Conditions of assessment</b>	<p>As stated above, although the majority of centres were applying the conditions of assessment as outlined by SQA, there were a number of issues identified at some centres:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Cutting scores not used for Outcomes 1–3.</li> <li>◆ Lack of guidance in some instances regarding pass criteria and notes allowed in the closed-book assessments.</li> <li>◆ Differing interpretations of when re-assessment was required as opposed to amendments to original script.</li> <li>◆ Marking allocation not provided to candidates.</li> </ul>
<b>Guidance on criteria for pass and validity to PCs and range/summary</b>	<p>Marking schemes for those centres that had adopted the revised assessment approaches for this session were appropriate, and in most cases provided the candidates with an indication of what was expected from them.</p> <p>Where candidates had provided answers that were appropriate but strayed from those outlined in the SQA exemplar, staff had taken appropriate action in awarding marks.</p>

<b>DE3K: Information and Communication Technology in Business</b>	
<b>Fitness for purpose/ integration</b>	The assessments used were almost exclusively the exemplar assessment instruments, with one centre using an adapted version of these assessments. The exemplar assessments are fit for purpose at SCQF level 8 and a common theme in the form of the case study runs across assessments.
<b>Quality of presentation</b>	Presentation was generally of an acceptable standard, with some centres submitting evidence on CD-ROM. Checklists were widely used and evidence included printouts, screen prints, word-processed, and handwritten work.
<b>Level of demand</b>	The Unit is a demanding one in that candidates can find the use of new software challenging. Whilst it can prove challenging, the Unit is set at SCQF level 8 and has a 2-credit value, which is appropriate for the level of work expected and the volume of assessment.
<b>Conditions of assessment</b>	The conditions of assessment are clearly established in the Unit specification and the exemplar document. From the submissions from many of the centres, there is no indication of how candidates are made aware of the required conditions. It is assumed that candidates are informed verbally or provided with an information sheet. The latter method of communication is preferable.
<b>Guidance on criteria for pass and validity to PCs and range/summary</b>	Like the conditions of assessment, it was not always clear how centres communicated the requirements that candidates would have to satisfy in order to achieve a pass.

<b>DE3A: Economic Issues an Introduction</b>	
<b>Fitness for purpose/ integration</b>	<p>The Unit specification is appropriate for candidates working at SCQF level 7. The majority of centres used the exemplar assessments, with a minority using assessments based upon the exemplar assessments, but with adaptations. Not all centres indicated that the assessments had passed through an internal moderation process, and it was difficult to judge whether some were merely accepting exemplar assessments without question, or whether scrutiny had taken place at some point in the past.</p> <p>There was no evidence of integration of assessments either within the Unit or with other Units. The nature of the Evidence Requirements would make integration unlikely.</p>
<b>Quality of presentation</b>	<p>The assessment conditions for all three assessments are closed-book with restricted notes and, as expected, most responses were handwritten. Presentation was generally acceptable and as might be expected under these circumstances. A small number of responses were word processed which is quite acceptable within the constraints of the specified assessment conditions (but may be difficult).</p>
<b>Level of demand</b>	<p>The Unit was judged to be set at the appropriate standard, and the assessments in the exemplar were generally in line with that standard. The third exemplar assessment could be improved, and in some instances the basic nature of the questions led candidates to providing simplistic and basic responses that did not meet the standard indicated in the Unit specification.</p>
<b>Conditions of assessment</b>	<p>The conditions of assessment are acceptable in terms of a standard at SCQF level 7. It was not clear in some cases how the conditions were communicated to candidates. Some centres added details onto the assessments or provided an information sheet with details.</p>
<b>Guidance on criteria for pass and validity to PCs and range/summary</b>	<p>The standards expected are outlined within the Unit specification and suggested solutions are provided within the exemplar. There is limited evidence as to how these criteria are communicated to candidates. Some centres added the criteria to the assessments. Where this was not done and no information sheet was provided, it is unclear how candidates were informed as to what constituted a pass.</p>

<b>DE3G: Economics 1: Micro and Macro Theory and Application</b>	
<b>Fitness for purpose/ integration</b>	<p>The Unit specification is appropriate for candidates working at SCQF level 8. All of the centres used the exemplar assessments. Not all centres indicated that the assessments had passed through an internal moderation process, therefore it was difficult to state whether they had accepted exemplar assessments without question, or whether scrutiny had taken place at some point in the past.</p> <p>There was evidence of integration of assessments for Outcomes 2 and 3 as stated in the assessment guidelines within the specification.</p>
<b>Quality of presentation</b>	<p>This was generally of an acceptable standard, though some centres had submitted closed-book work that had been word processed. These pieces of work may have been from candidates with learning needs. However, in one centre the closed-book work for both candidates was word processed, which suggests that this was common practice for all candidates in that centre.</p>
<b>Level of demand</b>	<p>The level of demand is appropriate for level 8 and the assessments in the exemplar were in line with the standard required. However, one internal verifier recorded that ‘the unsatisfactory nature of the assessment’ prevented verification taking place, but further details were not provided.</p>
<b>Conditions of assessment</b>	<p>The majority of centres were applying the conditions of assessment as outlined by SQA. There were a number of issues identified at a small number of centres:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Cutting scores had been used for both assessments, which is inappropriate</li> <li>◆ No guidance to candidates on pass criteria</li> <li>◆ Controlled time condition (1.5 hours) imposed for Assessment 1 which is an open-book assessment</li> <li>◆ No indication of marking on scripts</li> <li>◆ Pencil written script</li> </ul>
<b>Guidance on criteria for pass and validity to PCs and range/summary</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ The standards expected are outlined within the Unit specification and are further defined in the exemplar assessment. There is some evidence that these criteria are communicated to candidates in some centres. It is unclear how candidates at other centres were informed as to what constituted a pass.</li> </ul>

### 3 Evidence of candidate performance

<b>Overall</b>	
<b>Examples of good assessment practice/summary</b>	<p>The Panel members were happy with much of the practice that was evidenced in the majority of centres such as the use of checklists. Consequently the panel thought it should highlight some less common practices which other centres may wish to consider for adoption.</p> <p>A few centres issued candidates with a set of guidelines relating to plagiarism and other assessment issues which the candidate had to read and accept. This should leave candidates in no doubt as to what is deemed unacceptable and added a formality to the assessment process that can be otherwise eroded.</p> <p>A small number of centres issued candidates with information booklets/sheets with pertinent information relating to the Unit, covering issues such as content, resources and assessment etc.</p>
<b>Comparison over time</b>	<p>There was no direct comparison available between current Units and those in the comparator year. A general comparison was made against candidate evidence from Units contained within the old framework collected in 2004. A general conclusion is that standards are generally slightly higher in some components within the new Units compared to the old Units. This is in part due to the wording used in the Knowledge and/or skills and Evidence Requirements sections. The levelling of the new Units has had an impact on raising the standards required. It was also felt that the widespread use of exemplar assessments (or adaptations), has assisted in a greater uniformity in the application of an appropriate standard for the new Units.</p>
<b>DE3D: Managing People and Organisations</b>	
<b>Accuracy of assessment decisions</b>	<p>With very few exceptions, the assessment decisions made by centres were accurate and appropriate.</p>
<b>Consistency of application of standards</b>	<p>As previously stated, a number of centres have not been using the latest versions of the SQA exemplar. Despite this there is evidence that standards have been consistently applied.</p>
<b>DE3K: Information and Communication Technology in Business</b>	
<b>Accuracy of assessment decisions</b>	<p>Overall, the Panel judged that centres have made a good attempt at interpreting the required standard for candidate evidence and in applying that standard. Centres have used checklists to assist in this process. Overall, the interpretation and application of an appropriate standard has been good. Some of the candidate evidence can prove quite difficult to assess. This is particularly the case in Outcome 4 where evidence relates to the use of project management software.</p>
<b>Consistency of</b>	<p>The use of the exemplar assessments has undoubtedly assisted in the judgement and</p>

<b>application of standards</b>	application of an appropriate standard. It would be difficult to attain as uniform a standard in some areas of this Unit without a common set of assessments.
<b>DE3A: Economic Issues an Introduction</b>	
<b>Accuracy of assessment decisions</b>	<p>In the majority of cases, centres made a satisfactory attempt at interpreting the appropriate standard and applying it. There were instances where decisions within assessments were arguable, but this is not unexpected in assessments where there is a lack of a single predetermined correct response. Such instances tended to be sporadic without any particular pattern relating to specific questions. Centres need to take care that responses satisfactorily hit an appropriate standard.</p> <p>The use of the third assessment from the assessment exemplar has in some instances resulted in limited responses being generated and accepted when the standards indicated in the specification have not been covered at a suitable depth.</p>
<b>Consistency of application of standards</b>	<p>In general, there has been a genuine and reasonably successful approach to interpreting and applying the standards required. There has been widespread use of remediation and the extent of what has been permitted varies between centres. The discrepancies between centres in the application of remediation have in some cases led to an inconsistency in the application of a uniform standard. The line between what is accepted as suitable for remediation versus a re-assessment is far from clear and this is an important issue that centres must address. Some centres used fresh questions for re-sit/remediation purposes whilst others did not, again casting some doubt on the validity of a limited number of decisions. In a small number of cases it was the degree of remediation and poor recording of some responses that was questionable. These issues are important but they should not overshadow the judgement that in the large majority of centres the application of the required standard was evident.</p>
<b>DE3G: Economics 1: Micro and Macro Theory and Application</b>	
<b>Accuracy of assessment decisions</b>	The assessment decisions made by centres were accurate and appropriate.
<b>Consistency of application of standards</b>	Overall, there has been a successful approach to applying the standards required, as most centres have used the exemplar which has assisted in the application of standards in a consistent manner.