

Research and Information Services

MONITORING STANDARDS REPORT



HNC Social Care (G7D1)

Monitoring Standards Summary Report

HN Units scrutinised

Social Care Theory for Practice	DH3K
Social Policy and its Application to Social Services Provision	DH3L
Psychology for Social Care Practice	DH3M
Sociology for Social Care Practice	DH3N

1 Standards/Source document

The current HNC Social Care has within the framework a minimum of three SVQ Units from Health and Social Care level 3. This replaces the workplace HN Unit that was previously used to assess work practice.

These units were not requested as part of this monitoring exercise, so it was not possible for the panel to comment on changes to the application of the standards across the award where these units are integrated.

In the previous HNC, psychology and sociology were taught and assessed through one double-credit Unit. The current framework has returned to individual units so that candidates can undertake continuous development as they progress through the HNC, and so that equal weighting is given to both disciplines.

This separation was also intended to assist the integration of assessment and a fairer distribution of the loading of assessment. This has meant that the panel have found it difficult to draw meaningful comparisons with the previous HNC.

Social Policy was not part of the mandatory section of the HNC in 2003, so very few centres had submitted work for that Unit in the last review, and many of those who did had not submitted work for the 2007 Monitoring Standards.

2 Assessment instruments

There appears to be an uneven pattern within the delivery of the current HNC. Some of the colleges sampled are integrating assessment within and across Units, while others continue to assess each Unit independently, leading to over-assessment for candidates.

A centrally-produced set of exemplar materials was issued for this HNC, which points centres in the direction of individual assessments for each Unit. While this would be appropriate if candidates were undertaking individual Units, where the entire programme is taught, the Arrangements Document makes it clear that assessment should be integrated across Units to prevent over-assessment.

This situation is affecting the standardisation of assessment and the conditions of assessment. Assessing Units individually does not encourage or enable candidates to integrate their knowledge with their work practice; this was particularly

noticeable with the weaker candidates. It also means candidates experience an increased volume of work.

One college uses multiple choice questions for some of the applied science Units, so candidates have no opportunity to link knowledge to practice, and there is no guarantee that they actually could identify the theory — simply that they could work out which statement best met the question. If this form of assessment were used as part of a blended approach that would be more appropriate, but according to the information submitted, this is the assessment for one complete outcome, and part of another outcome, and is undertaken as an invigilated, closed book, exam which requires a pass mark of 20 out of 30. There is no record of how remediation would be used where a candidate did not achieve 20 marks.

The majority of colleges provided guidance on the criteria for a pass mark. In some the guidance was clear and detailed, in others less so. The only marker solutions seen were those produced in the exemplar materials.

Where integration had taken place in line with the Arrangements Document, the standard of the assessments designed was found to be very good overall.

The non-college centres submitting work had all used a fully integrated assessment strategy.

3 Evidence of candidate performance

There were some excellent examples of feedback to candidates, where the markers had given clear and full comments that would assist with any remediation required and give pointers for future assignments.

On the other hand, there were two centres that consistently provided poor, over-critical feedback in the form of handwritten comments on the scripts; these were not constructive or useful to the candidates who were required to remediate their work.

There is a notable increase in guidance to markers using the model devised for the Graded Unit. Where the exemplar material was used, this provided centres with marker guidance on what should be contained in the candidate work to achieve a pass mark.

There continues to be a lack of clarity, however, where some degree of remediation is required. It is seldom clear what the specific area requiring attention is. Although one college provided excellent feedback for all subject areas, two only provided negative feedback and no advice or guidance to the candidate.

Colleges had been asked to submit borderline passes on this occasion and this did highlight the lack of specific guidance to these candidates. It was not clear on many of the submitted scripts if these had been remediated or if this was the original, un-amended version. It was also unclear on some forms as to whether the college considered the final result to be a pass or a good pass following

remediation. In one instance, a candidate was able to reach a pass mark only after three remediation attempts on the same piece of work.

There was good evidence of internal verification of the assessment instruments. Of particular note was one college where the IV had noted the lack of integration on their feedback form and had asked that this be remedied for this year.

One college significantly over-assesses candidates, and its borderline pass was not in line with borderline passes from other colleges. This college was identified as over-assessing in 2003 and this has not improved.

One centre appeared to have differentiated between the marks given to two candidates in a way that was not supported by the evidence provided. One was given a bare pass and the other a good pass, but no criteria sheet was provided to support the decision, and the panel member looking at the work could find nothing to substantiate these decisions.

One centre had awarded a pass to work which clearly did not meet the standards required for the Unit, despite remediation. There were several colleges who allowed more than two remediation attempts on the same piece of work.

The panel noted that the weaker candidates were particularly poor in the application of knowledge to practice. With the new Units, where assessments are separated, this makes it even more difficult for weaker candidates to show how they use theory in their work with individuals.

One college had marked candidates down on spelling and grammar, and this had led to a P- score which was not supported by the content of the work submitted.

Overall there was a visible improvement in the presentation of candidate work since 2003, with the majority of work now being word-processed, which demonstrates a key skill improvement. It was noted that in 2003 the majority of references used came from textbooks, whereas in 2007 the majority of references came from websites. The panel's only concern with this related to the quality of the sites. For example, one candidate had relied solely on Wikipedia for all of the human development assignment, and this was felt to give too narrow a view of research.

4 Comparing Standards over time

The panel attempted, where possible, to look at work from the same colleges in the same areas over 2003 and 2007. Our view was that overall the standard of work has remained consistent over time.

5 Conclusions

From the scrutiny of the 2007 candidate evidence and the comparison (where possible) with the evidence from the 2003 archive of the awards, the decision is that standards have been maintained.

The candidate work demonstrated that the standard set for achievement of outcomes was more rigorous in two colleges and less rigorous in one, with the remaining ten producing a similar standard.

Assessment practices provided an inconsistent picture. Where integration was evident, there were some examples of improved standards. In the small number of colleges where units were being assessed individually, this demonstrates that assessment practice was above the required standard, and this is a concern.

6 Recommendations for SQA

The panel recommends that:

- ◆ Verification visits to colleges and to non-college centres delivering the HNC be increased.
- ◆ Colleges are encouraged to follow an integrated pathway for assessment.
- ◆ The issues identified here be shared with the HNC verification team and the Quality Support Team for the HNC.
- ◆ Throughout the year, some examples of good practice in assessment be identified and shared with all centres delivering the HNC.
- ◆ EVs monitor the reliance on websites for reference materials to ensure that those used are reliable sources.
- ◆ SQA hold a Quality Network event to consider approaches to integration of assessment.

7 Recommendations for centres

The panel recommends that centres:

- ◆ Revisit integration of assessment within and across Units.
- ◆ Where methods of integration have been found to be successful, share these with external verifiers during visits this year.
- ◆ Develop a protocol for over-reliance on web-based materials from limited sources.
- ◆ Provide clear guidance to candidates on their remediation policy and procedure.

Appendix: Unit report

1 The Units

Unit	Main Purpose	Candidate Profile	Uptake
DH3K: Social Care Theory for Practice	To introduce candidates to Social Care Theory for Practice	Full time, part time, day release	This is a Mandatory unit in the HNC
DH3L: Social Policy and it's Application to Social Services Provision	To introduce candidates to Social Policy and its application to Social Services Provision	Full time, part time, day release	This a Mandatory unit in the HNC
DH3M:Psychology for Social Care Practice	To introduce candidates to Psychology for Social Care Practice	Full time, part time, day release	This a Mandatory unit in the HNC
DH3N: Sociology for Social Care Practice	To introduce candidates to Sociology for Social Care Practice	Full time, part time, day release	This a Mandatory unit in the HNC

2 Assessment instruments

DH3K: Social Care Theory for Practice	
Fitness for purpose/integration	The assessment instruments for this unit were well constructed. All colleges continuing to use the values essay at an early stage in the course and one had linked this to the SVQ. The assessments submitted were fit for purpose and on or above the required standard. Integration was well managed on the whole for this unit.
Quality of presentation	Work was well presented by colleges and by candidates. One candidate had submitted handwritten work which was very difficult to read.
Level of demand	One college had more separate pieces of work leading to their demand being above the standard. The internal verifier report in this college showed that the need for integration had been identified for next year.
Conditions of assessment	The majority of colleges had well prepared clear assessments which built together to provide evidence of candidate's ability to identify theory and then to relate it to their own work practice.

Guidance on Criteria for pass and validity to PCs and range	One college had not provided any advice or guidance from the marker and feedback was all negative. Another had made very harsh comments which were not constructive. Very few stated the policy for remediation attempts. We would like to have seen greater consistency in approaching this aspect of marking.
DH3L: Social Policy and its Application to Social Service Provision	
Fitness for purpose/integration	Generally assessments are fit for purpose. However one college is asking for two 3000 word essays and this is substantially more than any of the other colleges we looked at in the sample. There was a wide variety of assessment instruments used for this unit. Some colleges have assessed by means of integrated case study others have devised stand alone questions and one uses a closed book examination. Two colleges were using the unit and assessments from the previous award. Five colleges did not integrate; the remaining seventeen did.
Quality of presentation	Overall the quality of presentation was good. One college provided excellent reports back to candidates which were really helpful in providing guidance for future assessments.
Level of demand	Generally the level of demand met the standards identified in the arrangements document with the exception of one college where the level is considerably greater.
Conditions of assessment	One college using closed book exam, majority using case study materials In one instance we found that candidates were marked down on the quality of the language of their explanations although the marker guidelines called for them to give examples, explain and describe. Markers were therefore applying their own variable criteria.
Guidance on Criteria for pass and validity to PCs and range	The majority provided clear explicit guidance on the criteria for a pass and in one case marker guidelines were submitted which contained specified expected solutions. We found one instance of a candidate being asked to add information that was inaccurate as remediation. This was that the NHS Community Care Act had been amended by the 1968 Social Work Scotland Act.
DH3M: Psychology for Social Care Practice	
Fitness for purpose/integration	There was a clear split in how colleges are approaching the assessment for this unit. There were three colleges using the exemplar assessment provided as guidance when this unit is taught as a stand alone unit. One college is using multiple choice questions as the main method of assessment. The remainder are using an integrated approach. There was concern that the multiple choice questions do not lead to candidates producing work of sufficient depth to satisfy the demands of the unit. The majority of colleges are using integration well, the exceptions being the one using multiple choice questions, and the two using the assessment designed to be used when the unit is taught as stand alone. There was some evidence of over integration using one assignment for 3 or 4 units resulting in some aspects of the candidates learning not being demonstrated at all.

Quality of presentation	The quality of presentation of materials was good, there is evidence that more candidates are using computers to type their assignments now which generally improves the presentation of their work. Some markers however continue to make handwritten notes on scripts and not provide clear and constructive feedback where remediation is required.
Level of demand	This was split, with one college asking for a 3000 word essay and one using multiple choice questions. There was some evidence of overuse of integration which led to limited responses in some areas particularly in the application of theories of human development. While the team appreciated the desire to test the knowledge of psychology in its application to practice, it is also important that candidates demonstrate that they have understood the concepts of the theory in order to apply it.
Conditions of assessment	The conditions of assessment were for the most part well explained and clear, giving candidates clear messages about what was expected from them in the assignment.
Guidance on Criteria for pass and validity to PCs and range	This area was variable with some colleges providing a very explicit statement for candidates on the criteria for a pass clearly mapped into the PCs and Learning Outcomes. None provided expected solutions apart from the exemplar materials.
DH3N: Sociology for Social Care Practice	
Fitness for purpose/integration	Assessment on the whole was fit for purpose apart from where candidates were asked for too much evidence. Twelve colleges had devised integrated assessments, the remaining ten in the sample were using the exemplar assessment designed to be used when the unit is taught stand alone. One college required candidates to prepare a 3000 word essay for this unit alone. There were some excellent examples of integrated assessment. Two colleges had attempted to integrate over 4 units and this led to specific knowledge of the subject area being weak. Those who chose not to integrate any of the outcomes either with others in the unit or across units are over assessing candidates.
Quality of presentation	Presentation was good. Students work was all prepared on the computer although some have yet to master the skills of paragraphs.
Level of demand	One candidate's work was marked down for spelling errors and grammatical mistakes. The centres who had not integrated assessment were asking more than those who had, resulting in candidates being asked to prepare an additional case study assignment.
Conditions of assessment	The conditions of assessment were for the most part well explained and clear, giving candidates clear messages about what was expected from them in the assignment.
Guidance on Criteria for pass and validity to PCs and range	This area was variable, some colleges providing very explicit statements for candidates on the criteria for a pass clearly mapped into the PCs and Learning Outcomes. Colleges using the prepared individual unit assessments provided expected solutions and marking instructions. Solutions are not expected as a matter of course.

3 Evidence of candidate performance

DH3K: Social Care Theory for Practice	
Accuracy of assessment decisions	It was noted that the weaker candidates were unable to relate theory to practice but on the whole the evidence produced was competent in meeting the standard expected for the unit. The majority of decisions were agreed to by the panel members
Consistency of application of standards	The panel felt that there was consistency overall.
Examples of good assessment practice/summary	One centre gave excellent feedback and support to a candidate who was able to achieve after 3 attempts. Another provided clear rationale for their marks to all candidates. 2 centres only gave negative feedback which did not identify for candidates the remediation required. Some comments only written on the candidate script no formal notification of the remediation was given
Comparison over time	This was the one unit that was present in both awards, although it has been significantly revised since 2003. There was an increase in demand in two centres and a significant decrease in demand in one.
DH3L: Social Policy and its Application to Social Services Provision	
Accuracy of assessment decisions	The majority of decisions were agreed with by the panel members. Weaker candidates were unable to relate theory to practice but on the whole the evidence produced was competent in meeting the standard expected for the unit
Consistency of application of standards	Two colleges were using the unit from the previous award and the assessment instruments from this. One assessment was substantially more demanding. One was a closed book assignment. The remaining eighteen had used integration of assessment well and were consistent in their application of the standards.
Examples of good assessment practice/summary	One centre gave excellent feedback, 2 centres only gave negative feedback which did not identify clearly the remediation required by candidates. The comments were handwritten on the scripts and were difficult to read. The remaining centres provided feedback sheets which were useful to the candidates.
Comparison over time	This unit was not part of the mandatory section of the previous award and had not been submitted for scrutiny in 2003.
DH3M: Psychology for Social Care Practice	
Accuracy of assessment decisions	The majority of decisions were agreed to by the panel members Weaker candidates were unable to relate theory to practice but on the whole the evidence produced was competent in meeting the standard expected for the unit
Consistency of application of standards	Candidate responses demonstrated consistency in this subject area over 2003 to 2007 although the unit was different the basic theoretical concepts remain the same. It was noted that where in 2003 references came mainly from books, in 2007 they came mainly from web sites. While this is not an issue in itself the team did note that some of the sites used contained only very basic information on the theories and this is something we should be aware of.

Examples of good assessment practice/summary	One centre gave excellent feedback, while another 2 centres only gave negative feedback which did not identify for candidates the remediation required. Some marker comments were only written on the candidate scripts and there was no formal notification of the remediation needed or whether this had been completed.
Comparison over time	The assessment instruments were not significantly different in the two years and the standard of the candidate response was similar therefore it could be seen that standards were being maintained. The only issue came from colleges who were using separate assessments for each of the units in the award.
DH3N: Sociology for Social Care Provision	
Accuracy of assessment decisions	The majority of decisions were agreed with by the panel members Weaker candidates were unable to relate theory to practice very well but on the whole the evidence produced was competent in meeting the standard expected for the unit
Consistency of application of standards	Candidate responses demonstrated consistency in this subject area over 2003 to 2007 although the unit was different the basic theoretical concepts remain the same. It was noted that where in 2003 references came mainly from books, in 2007 they came mainly from web sites. While this is not an issue in itself the team did note that some of the sites used contained only very basic information on the theories and this is something we should be aware of.
Examples of good assessment practice/summary	One centre gave excellent feedback, 2 centres only gave negative feedback which did not identify for candidates the remediation required. One centre had only given some handwritten comments on the candidate script. No formal notification of the remediation was given nor was there any evidence that the remediation had been carried out.
Comparison over time	The assessment instruments were not significantly different in the two years and the standard of the candidate response was similar therefore it could be seen that standards were being maintained. The only issue came from colleges who were using separate assessments for each of the units in the award.