



**Higher National Qualifications  
Internal Assessment Report 2016  
Biology**

The purpose of this report is to provide feedback to centres on verification in Higher National Qualifications in this subject

# Higher National units

Titles/levels of HN units verified:

|         |   |
|---------|---|
| DP4L 34 | Animal Biology                                  |
| DH2J 34 | Biochemistry: Theory and Practice               |
| F3SJ 34 | Biology: An Introduction                        |
| H927 34 | Cell Biology: Theory and Laboratory Skills      |
| DJ1K 34 | Cell Biology: Theory and Practice               |
| F3X2 34 | Classification and Identification of Organisms  |
| H929 34 | DNA and Genetics                                |
| DJ6Y 34 | DNA Structure and Function                      |
| DP4P 34 | Genetics  |
| H92C 35 | Human Body Structure and Function               |
| DG71 35 | Human Body Structure and Function               |
| DH2P 35 | Microbiological Techniques: Theory and Practice |
| H92G 34 | Microbiology: Theory and Laboratory Skills      |
| DH55 34 | Microbiology: Theory and Practice               |
| DP4M 34 | Plant Biology                                   |
| DP9M 34 | Science Industry: Key Issues                    |

## General comments

Nine external verification visits were carried out by the team this session.

Centres had a clear understanding of the standards required and the visits were successful. Where learners were interviewed, they highlighted a high degree of satisfaction.

The sector is currently in a period of transition from the old to the new HNC/D group awards. Centres are aware of the changes and are fully prepared for the transition. This transition is already well underway.

## Unit specifications, instruments of assessment and exemplification materials

The current unit specifications were in use. Instruments of assessment were valid and reliable, and fully compliant with the requirements of the unit specifications.

Assessors and internal verifiers had a good understanding of the evidence required for each of the units verified. Any discrepancies had been identified through internal verification and corrected accordingly. Internal quality control procedures were seen to be documented, robust, effective and routinely applied.

External verifiers were in agreement with all of the assessment and internal verification decisions at all centres sampled.

## **Administration of assessments**

All centres that were visited had clear, effective and routinely applied policies regarding the administration of assessments. All assessment conditions complied with the requirements of the relevant unit specification.

Assessment support packs, where available, were used.

Centres had good policy and practice on ensuring the authenticity of learner submissions, and routinely applied anti-plagiarism software to learner submissions.

The use of e-assessment, and e-delivery via centre VLEs is increasing. All centres complied with SQA policies and procedures regarding retention of evidence, security of storage and dissemination of external quality control reports.

## **General feedback**

Assessors and internal verifiers had an excellent understanding of the standards required. Delivery teams were enthusiastic, supportive and dedicated to the success of their learners.

External verifiers were in agreement with all of the assessment and internal verification decisions made.

Overall, this was a successful year for all centres involved in the external verification exercise.

## **Areas of good practice**

The external verifiers' comments in relation to good practice are included below:

- ◆ The use of a secure SharePoint database ensured high levels of document control and file sharing. The system ensured that all approved users had access to current assessments, records of verification, and the location of learning and teaching materials and standardisation records. This ensured that centre staff deployed robust assessment and internal verification/quality assurance processes.
- ◆ Learners had signed their assessment scripts to show that they had received and understood their feedback.
- ◆ One lecturer hosted weekly evening online sessions offering 'live' help in science, where learners can post questions and get course advice.
- ◆ Internal verifiers worked closely with assessors to support the refinement of model answers during the assessment process, therefore increasing reliability and objectivity during marking.
- ◆ All laboratory reports were sampled for a class delivered by a new lecturer. This feedback is an excellent way of developing new lecturers' confidence on assessment decisions.

- ◆ Cross-centre standardisation activities were taking place. This created a bank of questions to enable all campuses to deploy unique and valid instruments of assessment.
- ◆ The use of an online VLE facility allowed learners to access the Personal Development Planning Unit, which requires learners to analyse their prior achievements.

### **Specific areas for improvement**

The following recommendations were made on visit reports:

- ◆ Assessors should mark learner assessments in ink to provide a permanent record of assessment and internal verification.
- ◆ Centres should develop a standard cover page for learner assessments, which could include information to assist in the assessing and verification recording process.
- ◆ Internal verification documents should contain clear details on the overall result.

# Higher National graded units

DP50 35 Applied Biological Sciences: Graded Unit 2  
DR1P 35 Biomedical Sciences: Graded Unit 2

## General comments

Three external verification visits were carried out by the team this session.

Centres had a clear understanding of the standards required and the visits were successful.

Centres should ensure that learners undertake projects which are commensurate with a double credit unit at SCQF level 8.

The sector is currently in a period of transition from the old to the new HNC/D group awards.

## Unit specifications, instruments of assessment and exemplification materials

The current unit specifications were in use. Instruments of assessment were valid and reliable, and were fully compliant with the requirements of the unit specification.

Learners' work, at all centres visited, was accurately and consistently judged by assessors. The assessment judgments by the assessors and internal verifiers were confirmed by external verification to be accurate and consistent. The assessments were accompanied by clear marking guidelines.

Understanding Standards materials have now been published for the new Applied Biological Sciences: Graded Unit 2 (H91Y 35). These documents can be accessed from SQA's Understanding Standards website ([SQA Understanding Standards](#)). Centres are strongly advised to follow the standards as specified in these documents.

## Administration of assessments

All centres visited had clear, effective and routinely applied policies regarding the administration of assessments. All assessment conditions complied with the requirements of the relevant unit specification.

Centres had good policy and practice on ensuring the authenticity of learner submissions, and routinely applied anti-plagiarism software to learner submissions. All centres complied with SQA policies and procedures regarding retention of evidence, security of storage and dissemination of external quality control reports.

### **General feedback**

Delivery of the graded units at the centres visited was appropriate. Grading of learners was equitable, valid, reliable and fair. Delivery teams were dedicated and enthusiastic.

External verifiers were in agreement with all of the assessment and internal verification decisions made.

Centres are referred to the recently published Understanding Standards materials for Applied Biological Sciences: Graded Unit 2 (H91Y 35) which provides guidance, including information on the suitability of projects. Centres should ensure that learners undertake projects which are commensurate with a double credit unit at SCQF level 8.

Overall, this was a successful year for all centres involved in the external verification exercise.

### **Areas of good practice**

Provision was uniformly good or very good.

### **Specific areas for improvement**

No specific areas for improvement were identified during the external verification visits undertaken this session.