



Higher National Qualifications Internal Assessment Report 2015 Economics

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

Higher National Units

General comments

Over the past few years centres have faced significant changes and the impact of regionalisation is set to continue for at least the next year. Major changes have been felt in the area of staffing with the loss of many experienced assessors. New staff have been introduced, many taking new subjects for the first time. This associated with the integration of systems and procedures across different locations has added to the complexity of the environment in which many colleges operate. The SQA criterion-based quality assurance system has had a period of stability which has allowed centres to familiarise themselves with the new demands of this approach, and, in general, centres have adapted well to the requirements.

The Units are well established and centres are familiar with their requirements and the standards associated with each of them at SCQF levels 7 and 8. The major change has been the running of year 1 of the pilot of the HN Enhancement Project where a reduced assessment has been introduced for F7J8 34 with a one and a half hour examination with a cut-off score of 50%. This change of approach is significant and has been implemented to better align SQA HND courses with the demands of years 3 and 4 at universities. The project has a pilot period of one further year to run.

Unit specifications, instruments of assessment and exemplification materials

The success at external verification events supports the view that whilst there are new assessors delivering the Units at some centres, in the main, staff are familiar with the Unit specifications, the ASPs and the associated standards. It is still critical for staff to continue to refer back to the Unit specifications to maintain that knowledge, and it is also vital that they hold standardisation meetings to ensure a parity of assessment across sites that are at the correct standard for each Unit.

The centres visited exclusively used the SQA ASPs and some participated in the HN Enhancement Project and used the examination ASPs created by SQA. It was evident that staff at different sites within a centre were not always checking they were using the latest version of each ASP. This is a concern as it indicates a lack of co-ordination in the pre-delivery check phase of the internal verification process. Whilst in the cases identified the changes did not impact on the candidate performance it is an indication that further work on standardisation between different sites within a centre is required in some cases.

Evidence Requirements

Centres and staff had a clear understanding of the Evidence Requirements in each of the Units that were externally verified. In the case of the examination within the HN Enhancement Project, the centres visited had correctly judged the standard of work required to achieve the pass mark of 50%.

Where staff are new to delivering Economics Units it can be difficult to judge the standard required and supporting staff in these circumstances is vital — and standardisation meetings and ongoing support play a crucial part in successful delivery and assessment. External verification identified positive feedback from learners about the level of support and guidance that centres provide.

Administration of assessments

All centres are reported as organising and assessing candidates in accordance with the requirements set out in the Unit specifications. Centres need to maintain a check to ensure the authenticity of work undertaken under open-book conditions and oral checks may help in this area. Some centres used electronic checkers and anti-plagiarism software and this is becoming increasingly common for other Units where out-of-class work is now more common. Provided that checkers are set in an appropriate manner this can be an excellent means of reducing instances of plagiarism. The continuing security of assessments is of continuing importance in safeguarding the integrity of the Units and the Awards.

General feedback

The verification reports and discussions with candidates indicate that, as in previous years, there were excellent examples of feedback being given to candidates from assessors. This is particularly valuable in helping candidates identify and understand their strengths and weaknesses. Providing detailed feedback can be very time consuming, but good feedback is very valuable and centres are encouraged to continue with their efforts on this important means of communication.

Areas of good practice

There is an increasing use of electronic resources, providing feedback electronically and a general move away from paper-based materials and systems. Whilst 'going electronic' is not necessarily an example of good practice in its own right, it can have major benefits for candidates and staff. For example, online resources can be identified and added to an existing resource base with relative ease. Candidates can access materials from almost anywhere at any time giving greater flexibility in how they study which in turn is improving accessibility to HN courses.

Even an electronic registration system can allow for early indications of attendance problems. Electronic submission of assessments can enhance the importance of submitting work on time by having times when submissions are no longer allowed or where submissions are automatically flagged as being late. One centre recorded the number of practical assessments submitted by each candidate over a course of study. This helped identify early on where candidates were in danger of falling behind. Attendance and practical work submissions percentages were calculated for each candidate and could be correlated against the success of each candidate. The statistics relating to the candidate's use of materials in a VLE is just one further example of how technology can be used to identify candidates who require additional encouragement and support.

Specific areas for improvement

The main area for continued effort is in ensuring that all staff involved in the delivery and assessment of Units across a centre are all engaged in standardisation meetings. This is more crucial than ever now that individual centres may have several sites each with their own staff. Without this there is a real danger of staff and sites becoming isolated from one another which can lead to a mismatch in interpreting and applying standards.

As in past reports, areas for improvement are often more about maintaining current efforts. For example, continuing to make checks on plagiarism is in effect a never-ending task which requires to be undertaken each year. The security of all assessments again continues to be of prime importance and continued vigilance and effort is essential from all centres and staff. Overall, centres and staff are doing an excellent job and the enthusiasm of staff was again noted during verification visits.