



**Higher National Qualifications
Internal Assessment Report 2015
English and Communication**

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

Although the number of qualification verification events in 2014–15 has been limited, all centres selected for verification of HN Communication provision have had a successful outcome. All have had strengths identified and most have achieved the high level of confidence rating for the maintenance of SQA standards in all quality assurance categories.

The SQA Quality Assurance Criteria have provided a useful framework for the complex activities required to assure quality as more further education colleges in Scotland have merged to become large single institutions. Centre systems and procedures scrutinised have, in all centres, been efficient, well documented, detailed and accessible.

Mergers have, however, presented particular issues of cross-campus standardisation. At a time when the profile of learners is changing significantly, the management of assessment and internal verification procedures in the context of different campus traditions presents ongoing challenges for lead subject specialists.

Unit specifications, instruments of assessment and exemplification materials

Tutors are aware of the detail of current Unit specifications and broadly familiar with at least some SQA exemplar and support materials. The SQA Assessment Support Packs are often used as a model and adapted to suit the needs of learners.

Assessment tasks selected by centres are, for the most part, relevant to study programmes, appropriate for class groups and linked to, or integrated with, work across course programmes.

The SQA prior verification facility continues to support the validation and production of centre designed materials.

Evidence Requirements

Secure social media and e-mail are well used to facilitate and evidence communication.

A robust plagiarism policy, explained at induction, is often supported by effective tracking software, such as Turnitin. Some centres also conduct individual personal interviews with learners.

Qualifications Verifiers noted that some assessment instructions presented more challenge than others — sometimes, but not always, in use on different sites. There were instances of over-assessment. Where this was the case appropriate

actions — generally staff meetings and training sessions to agree baseline competences — were already in hand by lead tutors.

Administration of assessments

The administration of assessment is efficient. Records and materials presented for qualification verification have been found to be effectively organised and well documented. SQA quality criteria provide a framework and focus for standardisation.

Technology is, increasingly an essential element in cross-campus delivery and quality assurance. Detailed electronic records of every aspect of assessment including master folders, draft work, tutor feedback, evidence and results have been observed. Internal verifiers' decisions, agreements and required actions are generally well documented.

General feedback

Despite changes, learners continue to be well prepared and supported across all Units with many examples of good practice. Learning plans are routine. Support systems are generally put in place early in the year if there are gaps in recommended entry levels.

Access to assessment is fair and equitable, with extended guidance and support available for learners. Formal feedback provided by tutors continues to be encouraging and supportive in all Communication Units, with clear and precise guidance given on development requirements.

Learners interviewed were mostly positive about the support provided by tutors. Some felt, however, that the teaching/learning process did not take account of their prior experience and that there were missed opportunities for accelerated progress and integration of subject areas. They appreciated planned integration with other subjects to reduce their workload. This approach, however, is not always practical. Research skills and report writing training were seen as valuable to support course work and prepare for higher education.

Areas of good practice

The support that continues to be in place for learners is commendable, given the increased demands on resources. Formal feedback that is diplomatic, encouraging and clearly linked to Evidence Requirements is used to support and record skills development.

Secure electronic versions of master folders to include SQA Assessment Support Packs and any internally developed assessments — with detailed marking guides — has been particularly helpful where assessors work on a range of sites. Providing samples of 'borderline' evidence, with commentary, also supports standardisation and tutor judgement.

Group meetings of cross-campus staff to cross-mark work and discuss/assure agreement on assessment decisions is particularly valuable in a new merger situation. Recording these meetings can be helpful for staff unable to attend in person.

Providing copies of QV visit reports for each campus, retained in master folders, is a sensible method of ensuring the dissemination of information to all staff as well as the standardisation process.

Increasing use of web-based materials, social media and online support is encouraging learner independence.

Where all tutors are freed to attend the verification event, it can provide opportunities for staff development and exchanges of information with SQA staff.

Specific areas for improvement

Assessing Reading skills

Some variation in demand and in some cases a degree of over-assessment has been observed in evidence for Outcome 1. Teaching in-depth critical analysis may benefit particular groups of learners but it is not efficient nor valid to assess all aspects of skills taught, nor is it necessary to re-assess core skill competences. Applying different standards across awards and sites may confuse and disadvantage learners. Centres are advised to become familiar with approaches in the most current assessment support examples.

Assessing Writing skills

Practical integration with other research and written/oral work might be used to greater advantage to minimise the assessment burden. This is only practical where learners are able.

For some groups of learners a portfolio approach, where it is an option, may be more manageable to evidence writing skills.

Assessing Oral Communication skills

A detailed observation checklist should be used to record achievement, with precise comments and feedback based on Evidence Requirements. Some recording of evidence is advised if at all practical; social media and mobile devices may be used. Differing practices for recording minutes and discussions in cross-campus delivery would benefit from review and discussion; action minutes are acceptable in most business situations.

Further standardisation interaction is required between tutors and between campuses, with exemplars of baseline achievement.

More detailed guidance is being prepared by SQA for centres, on the specific requirements, Evidence Requirements and supporting information.

Higher National Graded Units

Titles/levels of HN Graded Units verified:

F6V7 34 Creative Industries: Media and Communication (Graded Unit 2)

General comments

Portfolio assignments verified have been presented to an exceptionally high standard. Significant strengths in the maintenance of standards in all quality categories have been achieved.

All the aims and purposes of the HNC/D awards are being met and exceeded. Progression success rates confirm the value of close working with higher education to match course content to future academic needs. Currency and relevance of skills developed is also assured.

QDT meetings will continue this year to review the Higher National awards, Unit specifications and exemplar materials.

Unit specifications, instruments of assessment and exemplification materials

Tutors teach and cross-mark as a team. They are completely familiar with the Unit specifications and instruments of assessment.

Use of a VLE and electronic master folders with detailed assessments and, where appropriate, making guides provides excellent information and support for both tutors and learners.

Evidence Requirements

Evidence Requirements are being met very satisfactorily. Portfolios and completed projects are to publication standard, well produced, creative and original.

Administration of assessments

In recognition of the importance of the grade awarded there is scrupulous attention to cross-marking by an experienced staff team. QA documentation is comprehensive and detailed. Immediate and documented action on any IV comment is routine practice.

General feedback

Although the emphasis in portfolio building is on autonomy and independence, constructive support is being given to learners in personal interviews and reviews at each stage of the process.

Learners interviewed have been very enthusiastic about the benefits of the course programmes. They appear confident and more than satisfied with the support and resources provided. The research and pitching elements are credited with providing a 'skills toolbox' to allow progress positively to places in the second or third year of a degree course.

Areas of good practice

Course entry interviews by experienced staff ensure that learners have the required entry qualifications and are realistic about the content and outcomes of the award programmes. The fact that they understand the considerable demands of courses is reflected in retention and progression rates.

Close working with higher education partners is effective and valuable. Interpretation of Unit specifications reflects the current requirements of degree course programmes.

Quality folders with detailed information on all aspects of delivery and decision-making are most valuable at this time of award revalidation. Information on retention rates, progression, tracking in destinations is particularly useful. It is also very helpful to Qualification Verifiers to be provided with such records in paper based as well as electronic formats.

Specific areas for improvement

There are no areas identified for improvement. Portfolios examined have all been to a very impressive standard.