



**Higher National Qualifications 2011
Internal Assessment Report
Management Skills**

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

Higher National Units

General comments

In common with previous years, verification activity during 2010–2011 illustrated once again that centres have a good general understanding of Unit specifications and the role they play in determining national standards. Most centres in this verification group have considerable experience of delivering Units at HN level and have well-established internal verification procedures to monitor assessment. Centres which are new to the SQA system, or which deliver only a few SQA Units, exhibit an enthusiasm and commitment to delivering Units effectively and appropriately.

Unit specifications, instruments of assessment and exemplification materials

Centres are well aware of relevant Unit specifications and other SQA material such as exemplar assessments. External verification during this session highlighted the good use that centres make of support material and the strong systems, often based around master files or packs, which many centres have developed and refined over the years.

Evidence Requirements

Once again, external verification confirmed that centres understand the role of Evidence Requirements. Many of the Units in this verification group are accompanied by specially developed SQA support materials which have contributed significantly in translating the Evidence Requirements into workable instruments of assessment and in clarifying other parts of a Unit specification.

Centres do not always find it easy to make assessment judgements which are appropriate to the SCQF level of a Unit. This works in two ways — standards can be set too high but there is also the danger of accepting work which barely reaches the standard required by the SCQF level.

One reason for this may be that the Evidence Requirements for some Units in this verification group are proving to be more substantial than is perhaps justified by the credit value of the Unit. As a result, the assessment load for candidates is larger than is perhaps desirable. It is hoped to take action to address this issue during the 2011–2012 session.

Administration of assessments

Many Units in this verification group are accompanied by exemplar assessments. This helps to ensure that assessments are normally set at an appropriate level as centres generally follow the exact requirements of exemplar assessment materials and monitor this through internal verification. Sound exemplar assessment materials ensure that all knowledge/skills items are covered and all aspects of the Evidence Requirements are met. They also take into account the SCQF level of the Unit. As noted above, there are some Units where the Evidence Requirements have, with experience, proved to require a greater volume of assessment than is warranted by the level of the Unit. This is also reflected in assessment exemplars.

Further general feedback

There were a relatively small number of External Verifier (EV) visits in this verification group during 2010–2011. This means that general conclusions across all centres are not easy to draw. The following general points did come through:

- ◆ Centres take their responsibilities for assessment and internal verification seriously and work hard to fulfil them.
- ◆ Staff at centres are committed to ensuring that candidates are properly prepared for assessment and fully supported during the learning process.
- ◆ Candidates always gave very positive feedback on the learning experience they had received.
- ◆ Centres approach assessment for candidates who have additional learning requirements in a positive and constructive manner.

Areas of good practice

Previous reports have commented on the good practice shown by centres. It is encouraging that external verification during 2010–2011 confirmed that these continue. Good practice noted in EV reports during this session included:

- ◆ the use of master packs containing all the requisite background material, eg Unit specification, assessment plan, feedback sheets for learners, assessment instruments and marking sheets, Internal Verifier (IV) records, etc.
- ◆ providing support material on a virtual learning environment (VLE) and developing approaches to address issues such as authenticity, course management, and how best to provide on-going support to learners
- ◆ good strong IV processes which clearly signal what internal verification had taken place and what was planned and which provided clear feedback: this included the use of internal verification checklists that give clear advice to assessors and provide comments on the suitability or otherwise of marking and feedback to candidates for each class group
- ◆ concise instructions to assessors and Internal Verifiers contained in the centre's procedures for quality assurance in relation to SQA courses
- ◆ detailed feedback from assessors to learners

Specific areas for improvement

As already noted, the relatively small number of EV visits makes it difficult to make generalised comments which apply across all centres. The good practice outlined above may suggest to some centres possible improvements they could consider to the way they approach the delivery, assessment and internal verification of Units in this verification group. The following summarises some of the suggestions that were made as a result of external verification during 2010–2011. They may not apply to all centres but may provide scope for reflection on current practice. The main developments suggested were:

- ◆ Find ways to promote consistency of assessment judgements over time and between assessors. Possible ways to do this include: developing and extending existing marking guidelines so that, as accurately as possible, they indicate what is the minimum requirement and specify what candidates should provide and what would (and would not) be acceptable; using appropriate checklists and ensuring consistency in their use; preparing marking guidelines for Units where they are not currently available (often for

Units where there is only one assessor); formalising standardisation meetings so that approaches to assessment can be recorded.

- ◆ Consider ways to give more detailed feedback to candidates and provide this timeously. This can cover where they have performed well, as well as where they need direction on how to achieve.
- ◆ Ensure that a minimum of two sets of assessment instruments are available for each Unit and that, if necessary, they are prior verified by SQA. There is scope also for centres to rely less heavily on exemplar assessments (which in some cases are becoming dated) and to develop their own alternative assessments, which could reflect local situations familiar to candidates.
- ◆ Continue to ensure that assessment decisions are made at a level appropriate to the SCQF rating of the Unit.

Higher National Graded Units

Titles/levels of HN Graded Units verified

DW2X 34: HNC Management Graded Unit

General comments

There was very little verification activity related to the Graded Unit within this verification group during 2010–2011. Most centres delivering the HNC Management Graded Unit have been successfully verified in previous years. Hence, this session has yielded only a limited amount of new evidence on delivery. The comments below should be read in the light of this situation.

Unit specifications, instruments of assessment and exemplification materials

All indications are that centres are well aware of the Graded Unit specification and the exemplar assessment pack which accompanies it. The verification conducted this session provided confirmation of this.

Evidence Requirements

As indicated above, centres appear to be well aware of the Evidence Requirements of the Graded Unit. Previous verification experience, confirmed during this session, is that centres understand the type of evidence required. Verification this year illustrated that centres are well able to help candidates choose topics which will enable them to generate suitable evidence.

Administer assessments

Verification this session confirmed that the Graded Unit is assessed at the appropriate level. Factors contributing to this include:

- ◆ choice of suitable topic — as a result of advice from the centre
- ◆ appropriate guidance to candidates on how to tackle the various stages of the Graded Unit
- ◆ valid and helpful feedback to candidates during the process of the Graded Unit
- ◆ following the guidance in the exemplar assessment pack

Areas of good practice

The verification this session confirmed several aspects of good practice which have been noted before. They include:

- ◆ paying attention to ensuring that candidates are properly briefed on the Graded Unit specification and what it entails — this covered the fact that candidates had been well advised as their choice of topic and had, as a result, chosen wisely
- ◆ instructing candidates to set out their work in a way which follows the Graded Unit specification
- ◆ assessor comments on the marking scheme to explain assessment decisions — this helps to indicate that suitable criteria have been applied
- ◆ detailed IV reports giving reasons to support the IV decision

Specific areas for improvement

Verification this year also confirmed areas which could form the basis of further development and enhance the delivery and assessment of the HNC Management Graded Unit. They include:

- ◆ Double-marking of Graded Unit scripts can help to standardise assessor decisions. Internal verification can then both proceed more smoothly and achieve further standardisation by reviewing and resolving any significant differences between assessors. Over time the need for double-marking can diminish as standards become embedded.
- ◆ Working with the marking guidelines so that they can be extended and clarified in the light of experience of marking candidate work. This can include incorporating specific examples of marks awarded and making use of sample sections drawn from actual scripts. This is likely to be an on-going process.
- ◆ Making sure when awarding marks that assessors provide reasons and justification for the marks awarded.
- ◆ Ensuring that the marks awarded are consistent with SCQF level 7 — which is the one that applies to the HNC Management Graded Unit. This can guard against the tendency to interpret the marking guidelines more leniently than is warranted for a Unit at SCQF level 7.