



Higher National Qualifications Internal Assessment Report 2014 Management Skills

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

All centres verified during 2013–14 have considerable experience in delivering Higher National Units and, as a result, they have a good understanding of the principles of Unit specifications which they apply to Units in this verification group. Delivery teams use the support materials and the assessment exemplars, which provide substantial help in interpreting and maintaining standards. In addition, centres generally have well-established systems and procedures for assessment and internal verification, which ensure that the Units and the execution of the Units are well supported.

Most staff delivering Units in this verification group are also very experienced but, where less experienced staff were involved, centre systems, particularly those designed to support new staff, were generally robust and ensured that standards are maintained. Despite the revision of some of the HNC Management Units, exemplars and assessment materials, uptake of the HNC Management has been very low. Consequently, there were very few verifications and no Graded Unit verification conducted within this group, which makes it hard to draw any meaningful conclusions. The external verifications that did take place focused on the following Units: Behavioural Skills for Business (F84L 35), Project Management (F1NH 34) and Supervision and Management (F5CP 34).

Unit specifications, instruments of assessment and exemplification materials

As indicated above, centres appear to be thoroughly familiar with the relevant Unit specifications. Their quality assurance systems through verification and standardisation ensure that the current Unit specifications are in use and assessment instruments checked in this regard.

Centres are also familiar with associated SQA exemplar assessments. When these are available for a Unit, centres are using them. Where these are not available, centres have generally robust systems to ensure that assessment instruments developed are appropriate and in most cases prior verification is used to ensure the assessments being used are appropriate, which is a clear example of good practice.

Most centres have developed systems which entail the development of master files or packs which contain relevant material for a Unit, such as the Unit specification, assessment instruments, notes of internal verification meetings and any items arising. Sometimes the packs also contain learning and teaching material, including SQA support material for those Units where it is available. Some centres prefer to keep the teaching material separate so that the packs focus exclusively on assessment and internal verification. The creation of such packs helps in maintaining standards and makes internal and external verification easier to conduct and focused.

Evidence Requirements

External verification confirmed, as has been commented upon in previous reports, that centres fully understand the role of Unit evidence requirements. SQA exemplar assessment packs play an important role in supporting centres by providing instruments of assessment, assessment checklists and assessment guidelines, which all help to ensure that the Unit evidence requirements are understood and met. Many of the Units in this group associated with the HNC Management Award are further supported by specially-developed SQA support packs, which when taken in conjunction with exemplar assessment packs help to clarify the interpretation of Unit evidence requirements.

With respect to Units in the HNC Management award there was a general feeling that there was a potential issue of over-assessment and inflexibility in the assessment approaches used. The rewriting of these Unit specifications, the assessment exemplars and support materials should provide centres with the flexibility desired while still maintaining the standards required. Centres now have assessment options for these Units which enable conventional (traditional) assessment as well as web 2.0 assessment approaches. Despite the low uptake the approach appears to have been well received.

The vast majority of centres are well versed in ensuring candidates demonstrate that they meet the evidence requirements; however, there are still some areas where centres need to remain vigilant. These are noted below:

Group activities — It is generally accepted that group work is an excellent and in some cases the required method of generating evidence to meet the Unit evidence requirements. When using group work centres need to ensure that there is sufficient evidence to demonstrate that each and every candidate has met the evidence requirements. Examples of evidence could include: copies of minutes of group meetings; annotated notes to show individual contribution; completed checklists (see below); recordings; photographs and video. A number of e-portfolio models, eg Mahara, allow for the tracking of individual contributions, which should help in this regard.

Checklists — All centres use checklists to help show that evidence requirements have been met. This is good practice but while checklists can be extremely useful on their own they are often insufficient. Wherever possible, completed checklists should be supported by other evidence, eg copy of a presentation, video or photographs. Ideally, the checklists should include a narrative, be countersigned by the candidate and, where appropriate, include a reflection by the candidate regarding their performance.

Remediation — Again, most centres provide appropriate assessment and remediation opportunities. It is important that where remediation has taken place that this is clearly indicated and sufficient evidence is provided to demonstrate that it meets the requirements. It is rarely sufficient to merely make a note that the item was discussed and agreed.

The level of some Units, eg Behavioural Skills for Business at SCQF level 8, requires evidence that reflects the SCQF level and articulates the application of the theoretical models taught. In most cases this does happen but there are occasions where this evidence falls short and centres should ensure that this is addressed through internal verification and standardisation meetings.

Administration of assessments

The development of assessment exemplars for most of the Units verified helps to ensure that assessments are administered in line with the Unit specifications. It also helps to ensure that the instruments of assessment are appropriate and enables candidates to generate sufficient evidence of an appropriate standard. The guidance and/or checklists provided in these exemplar packs help to support the assessment decision.

As stated earlier, centres also have well-established internal verification procedures, eg pre-delivery meetings, which ensure that the Unit specification and the assessment instrument being used are current. Where exemplars are used these ensure that the assessment instrument is appropriate and it is encouraging to see that centres do through their own procedures, verify that this is the case. These internal verification procedures also ensure that assessment decisions are checked as part of a sampling process, that feedback is given to assessors, and where corrective action is identified it is appropriately actioned.

Discussions with candidates confirm that planning for assessments is clear and that any requirements as outlined in specific Units are complied with. Candidates are well prepared for their assessments and appropriate support is given. Arrangements for remediation or resubmission are also clear and the evidence made available during this year's visits confirms that this is the case. As indicated earlier, it is important that where remediation is carried out there is sufficient attributable evidence provided.

All centres have in place policies and procedures relating to plagiarism and cheating and all candidates were aware of these policies and the associated penalties. Candidates are generally required to sign a declaration that the work submitted is their own. The judgement as to whether a submission is authentic sits with the assessor and the internal verifier. More often than not, due to the assessor's subject knowledge and their general knowledge of the candidate, this general approach works. However, a number of centres are now supporting this further by using packages such as 'Turnitin' and 'SafeAssign' to support staff.

As in previous years, verification during this session has highlighted that the main issue with Units in this verification group is ensuring that assessment judgements reflect the SCQF level of the Unit, particularly those judgements relating to Behavioural Skills for Business (F84L 35). Centres use the exemplars provided for this Unit but the case study assessment is quite wide ranging and cannot cover every possibility and therefore does require a degree of interpretation. As a result, assessors and internal verifiers do not always find it easy to set a suitable standard.

It is worthwhile reiterating the consequences of this, as stated in previous reports:

'This can lead to making more demands on candidates than is warranted by the SCQF level but it can also result in work being accepted which is not fully up to the standard set by the SCQF level attached to the Unit.'

It can also lead to some inconsistency in assessment judgements — this is particularly the case where an assessment consists of a number of discrete questions: responses to some questions clearly meet the relevant SCQF level, but responses to others raise doubts as to whether the appropriate level has been achieved.'

Internal verification procedures in the centres are of a high standard and based on the evidence work well. There is, as ever, a need to ensure that where Units are delivered across faculties or through different mediums, eg online *versus* traditional, that standards are maintained for all candidates. In one case the level of feedback provided to candidates differed between the different delivery approaches being used, as did the level of feedback from the internal verifier to the assessor.

General feedback

Consistently, external verification reports referred to the commitment and enthusiasm of staff involved in assessment and internal verification, and particularly the effort they had put in to ensure that all aspects of the assessment process were fully covered. There were some very good examples of assessor feedback where the assessor had taken time to provide a high level of supportive and developmental feedback, which provided clear direction and advice for candidates.

One of the enjoyable aspects of any visit is having the opportunity to meet with candidates. Discussions with candidates this year, as in previous years, highlighted very positive learning experiences. Almost all candidates were very complimentary about the teaching and support that they had received, which is testimony to the hard work and commitment of centre staff. All candidates interviewed indicated that their centre had clear procedures and processes in place for resubmissions, authenticity, appeals and complaints. All of which helps to clarify expectations.

Centres work very hard to ensure equality of access to assessment for candidates and most have excellent support systems in place. These support systems include in all cases, subject support provided by delivery staff, quite often outwith class, to central support for learners where access to equipment and other specialist resources is available. Discussions with candidates confirm their awareness of the support available and there was sufficient evidence to demonstrate that these support arrangements do work.

Areas of good practice

There were a lot of examples of good practice, several of which have been referred to above. With some repetition of earlier points and previous reports, the following list summarises the main areas of good practice identified during external verification visits:

- ◆ The commitment and conscientiousness of staff involved in assessment and internal verification
- ◆ Strong centre processes with clear, transparent evidence (eg completed forms, minutes of meetings) that standardisation and internal verification procedures were in place and working
- ◆ Master folders/files containing all requisite information for assessment and internal verification
- ◆ Detailed comments from assessors on assessment checklists and scripts which relate to the assessment guidelines provided and help candidates to deepen and further their learning
- ◆ Integration of SQA support packs into learning
- ◆ Extremely high levels of candidate support which is clearly recognised by candidates and is a testimony to centre staff

Specific areas for improvement

Overall, external verification confirmed that centres generally deliver Units in this verification group well. Where there were specific issues raised these are covered in the action points given for that particular visit. As a result, centres should be aware of things they can do which might address their particular situation.

However, the good practice outlined above may help centres to think about their practice and consider whether they could make changes that might enhance the delivery, assessment and internal verification of Units in this verification group.

Centres can also review their practice in the light of improvements suggested to others. The following list shows some of the suggestions for improvement, some of which were made in last year's report but which are still valid:

1 Through standardisation meetings develop extended marking guidelines reflecting the SCQF level (basing them on the guidelines in the exemplars, where these are being used) to emphasise exactly what would and would not be acceptable in a response.

This would:

- ◆ make it easier to differentiate more precisely between candidates who had provided an acceptable response and those who had not
- ◆ enable candidates requiring remediation to be given a very clear indication of where their response had fallen short of the standard

- ◆ contribute to consistency among assessors and in the nature and amount of evidence provided by candidates

2. Continue to encourage candidates to provide answers at the appropriate level, particularly SCQF level 8. In responses to case studies at SCQF level 8 describing theory is frequently not necessary and quite often a mere repetition of theory can lead to issues of plagiarism. Candidates can demonstrate their understanding of theories by their choice of example and the reasons they give to support it.

This could involve:

- ◆ choosing a suitable theory, approach or technique
- ◆ giving a precise example from the case study and
- ◆ giving a reasoned justification why the theory/technique was appropriate in this instance

This should help make candidates aware that in a case study at level 8 it is an understanding of the theory that is being sought. This approach can be incorporated in the extended marking guidelines recommended in point 1 above.

3. Through assessment and verification procedures ensure that assessment decisions are at the appropriate level and that feedback given to candidates is sufficient and appropriate.

4. Continue to generate sufficient evidence to demonstrate that evidence requirements are being met particularly where practical tasks, group work or role plays are used.

Finally, the EV team would like to thank all the centres for their hard work and contribution. The level of work produced by candidates is generally of a very high level, which reflects the good work of everyone concerned. Ensuring that the awards continue to meet the needs of candidates relies on good robust partnerships; the EVs feel that this has been strong over the years and look forward to this continuing in future years.