



**Higher National Qualifications 2011  
Internal Assessment Report  
Music, Music Business and Sound  
Production**

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

This report is based on external verification visits for each of the three awards:

- ◆ HN Music Business
- ◆ HN Music
- ◆ HN Sound Production

In Scotland there are around 15 colleges offering HN Music, 8 HN Music Business, and 19 HN Sound Production.

In terms of understanding national standards, there is variation across the sector, demonstrated by the fact that there was great praise for the work in some centres and issues in others. In one centre in particular the standard of evidence produced was very low.

In general, centres appear to be adhering to national standards and, in the main, practice is very good.

## Unit specifications, instruments of assessment and exemplification materials

From the sample of centres selected for verification it appears that, in general, assessors are familiar with Unit specifications, instruments of assessment and exemplification material. External Verifiers (EVs) had commended staff in some centres for their accurate interpretation of Unit specifications and requirements, and their use of resources.

## Evidence Requirements

The sampled evidence would suggest that there is, overall, a clear understanding of the Evidence Requirements for the Unit(s).

## Administration of assessments

From the sample it seems that, overall, centre assessments are at the appropriate level. One centre was the exception to this.

In one centre, the high quality work in assessment of Music Theory was commended. Centres were, in the main, also commended for their innovative use of virtual learning environments (VLEs).

Candidates are given the opportunity to be assessed in a number of situations. For example, music candidates perform in local venues with video evidence of the performance. The video footage of performances clearly demonstrates that candidates are working to the appropriate musical level. Sound production candidates are assessed on a range of audio/sound production equipment in both live sound and recording studio environments. Assessments appear to give candidates a 'real life' experience.

External Verifiers commented on the fact that centres, generally, had very good, robust systems for internal verification in place and that staff were adhering to these systems. One centre had, in effect, 'live' internal verification because of the way two assessors use double-marking, therefore ensuring standards.

## Further general feedback

Feedback to candidates was very good with only one exception. There was some variation but in one case VLE evidence demonstrated a very high standard of feedback to candidates.

Almost all feedback from candidates was very positive with most acknowledging and valuing the support given by tutors/assessors.

Access to assessment was thought to be fair for all.

There was evidence of integration of delivery and assessment. Also, some centres were making very good use of e-assessment. This type of activity has the potential to alleviate the volume of assessment.

### **Areas of good practice/areas for improvement**

In one centre the assessment instruments created by the department for the Unit Music Theory 1 were considered to be very good.

Where a VLE was used for the Creative Industries Units, it was obvious that these Units were being conscientiously delivered and assessed, although this system is time-intensive and involves commitment. However, the EV reported that this approach had been of great benefit to the students and has produced a high standard of work.

In other centres the course was delivered in a working studio and had input from industry professionals visiting the college as guest lecturers.

Another centre had started a choir for all music candidates. The EV considered this exemplary practice because of the way candidates learn musical concepts and, by doing so, benefiting their overall knowledge and skill. The choir also became an effective marketing tool for the centre through the numerous performance opportunities.

In general, course teams are highly motivated and well informed about the assessment and internal verification procedures. They are committed to producing high quality learning environments, learning and teaching materials, and rigorous and robust assessments. Teams are giving serious consideration to the planning of integrated approaches to assessment at both Unit content level as well as integration across programmes, a factor that should be of significance to the experience of every candidate.

Centres are generally very well equipped and up-to-date and this affords candidates an excellent learning experience. Tutors/assessors are generally active themselves in the music and/or sound industries and this is especially true in the case of part-time staff. This factor, coupled with visiting lectures from industry professionals, brings the industry into the classroom and ensures access to the latest information as well as access to these professionals.

### **Specific areas for improvement**

Generally, of the centres selected for verification, there were only a few areas for improvement from the sample.

# Higher National Graded Units

## Titles/levels of HN Graded Units verified

F508 34 Music Graded Unit 1: (SCQF level 7)

F506 34 Sound Production Graded Unit 1: (SCQF level 7)

F507 34 Music Business Graded Unit 1: (SCQF level 7)

DR33 35 Music Graded Unit 2: (SCQF level 8)

DR2R 35 Sound Production Graded Unit 2: (SCQF level 8)

DR34 35 Music Business Graded Unit 2: (SCQF level 8)

### General comments

From the sample of centres verified it was found that there is some variation across centres in their understanding of the requirements of the national standards. The variation concerns the requirements at all three stages generally, and for the developing stage specifically. The variations are common in the Graded Units (GUs) at both levels 7 and 8. There is, however, an improvement on last year.

### Unit specifications, instruments of assessment and exemplification materials

Assessors are familiar with the Unit specifications, instruments of assessment and exemplification materials, as well as the SQA online support material for the SCQF level 7 Graded Unit. These Units have been delivered for the past six years. However, as this Unit template is different from all other HN Unit templates, there is still some confusion about this and sometimes a perception that because the Unit specification looks different that it must be a much more demanding Unit than others at the same level and credit value.

### Evidence Requirements

There is still some confusion and misunderstanding relating to the Evidence Requirements for GU 1 at SCQF level 7, in all frameworks. However, the SQA online support material for SCQF level 7 GU has helped significantly. There seems to be less confusion over the Evidence Requirements for GU 2 at SCQF level 8.

Because of the timing of EV visits for Graded Units the key requirement for verification is that the planning and developing stages are complete, with at least an indicative mark allocated. This generally means that the evaluation stage is not complete and is therefore rarely verified.

In GU 1 the candidate is required to showcase themselves by producing a portfolio. They must plan, develop (put the portfolio together) and evaluate the portfolio. Evidence must meet the required criteria for all three stages.

There has been a tendency in the developing stage for some candidates to produce essay-style evidence related to what was studied in each mandatory Unit. This was not the case in every centre. Generally, and in centres that advocate the use of the online support materials, project requirements were accurately reflected.

The quality and purpose of logbook entries varies across centres and is not always as intended, ie as a mechanism to help candidates develop through reflection and help build a routine where they track progress and achievement.

In all frameworks, for GU 2, the Evidence Requirements again are to plan, develop and evaluate. However, the central output for the developing stage is an oral presentation and

interview where candidates pitch for a job or for a potential funding opportunity. Some presentations were considered to be over long. Candidates must present themselves to a panel of potential employers or potential financial backers and they should use materials to exemplify skills; audio or video recordings would be expected here. For verification purposes it would be useful to have access to any slides used because it can be difficult to read slides on the video evidence presented.

Assessors must ensure candidates do not simply discuss equipment used and the techniques employed. Candidates should introduce themselves and focus on making a pitch for a job or financial backing rather than discussing the mandatory Units. During their pitch they should talk about the skills they have and that they acquired them through study; it is not necessary to talk about the Units themselves. Their skill will be implicit if they carefully selected items for their presentation such as audio and video materials. Business knowledge should be demonstrated, especially if the pitch is to a potential financial backer. In some centres very little was stated regarding financing the business opportunity, how it would be promoted, the legal framework and any health and safety issues. The television programme, *Dragons' Den* could be used to demonstrate how to pitch and to show why making exaggerated claims, or not being prepared, could be disastrous.

Centres should focus on ensuring that their candidates present in a real-life scenario and not a college-devised, mock/virtual presentation and interview because it is likely that this is exactly what they will soon have to do.

Candidates are supported through a series of mentoring sessions for both Graded Units. Any mistakes should be picked up during these sessions and candidates re-directed. There is evidence to show this is generally happening in centres.

### **Administration of assessments**

The assessments are fairly prescriptive for these Graded Units and all centres use the SQA exemplar and support materials. Assessments are therefore at the appropriate level and, generally, are administered correctly.

Internal verification procedures are generally robust and many centres are also making good use of electronic IV folders with systems in place for efficient file management.

Marking and assessment is generally consistent and assessors are conscientious. In some centres a team approach to marking and verification was apparent.

There appears to be good systematic verification procedures and, overall, assessment decisions are fair and consistent. In one centre the EV noted that there was good recording of mentoring interviews and an excellent systematic internal verification process.

### **Further general feedback**

Feedback to candidates was generally very good.

Access to assessment was thought to be fair for all candidates. Each centre delivered in one location therefore the process was easily managed and tutors/assessors appeared very supportive.

In terms of the level 8 Graded Unit, audio quality was an issue in a fair number of the centres. Candidates should not be interrupted during their presentation and assessors (the panel) should wait until the end of the presentation before asking questions (in an interview) to clarify content.

Course teams should not be reluctant to award high marks, even maximum marks, if a candidate is deemed to have achieved everything expected of them in the context of the assessment specification.

### **Areas of good practice/areas for improvement**

Across the sector, tutors delivering and assessing these Units are industry practitioners and are committed to giving candidates a realistic experience reflecting the customs and practices of their industries.

The following highlights some areas of good practice:

- ◆ A number of centres have extensive materials and support available on their college VLEs.
- ◆ One centre had a logbook system containing useful prompts to help candidates.
- ◆ In another centre the EV commented on the use of a well-designed pro-forma used by the presentation panel to record marks.

### **Specific areas for improvement**

For the SCQF level 7 Graded Unit, centres must continue to ensure candidates plan and produce a showcase portfolio where they select materials, justify selection and demonstrate integration of knowledge and/or skills. They should not simply include random items from across the course.

This also applies to the SCQF level 8 Graded Unit. Furthermore, a presentation is necessary where candidates 'pitch' appropriately and do not simply present the course and the Unit content. When briefing candidates, assessors should advise them to keep in mind *Dragons' Den*.