



# **HN Internal Assessment Report: Management Skills**

Sector Panel or SSC:            Management Standards Centre (MSC)

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

## Feedback to centres

### General comments

There were few external verification visits in this verification group during session 2008–2009. All involved Units delivered as part of other awards such as Contracting Operations. The visits did, however, cover the new Units introduced as part of the recent review of SQA Management awards. There are still some older Units which are reaching the end of their delivery cycle.

All the evidence from centres indicates that Units in this verification group are being delivered in a very satisfactory manner. It would appear, although the evidence is limited, that centres are coping well with the new Units. This is largely because centres are making use of exemplar assessment packs which they can integrate into well-established systems and procedures for delivering and assessing HN Units. All EV visits indicated that appropriate assessment judgements are generally being made.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that the support material associated with the Units is of a high quality and valuable to candidates especially, but by no means exclusively, those following a distance-learning mode of delivery.

Overall, therefore, centres continue to deliver Units in this moderation group capably and competently.

### Advice on good practice and areas for further development

The small number of visits makes it difficult to draw firm conclusions on good practice and further development, but the positive trends apparent in previous years seem to be continuing.

#### Good practice

The following aspects of good practice have all been noted in previous years but it is encouraging that all were specifically mentioned by External Verifiers during 2008–2009:

- ◆ Detailed and useful assessor feedback from assessors to candidates on performance — this is time consuming but there is no doubt that it enhances candidate learning and improves assessment performance. Many centres have standard systems such as a front cover sheet for this, but this is often supplemented by additional comments from assessors on candidate scripts.
- ◆ Capable and useful internal verification — this contributed to a good standard of work by candidates.
- ◆ Use of exemplar assessment packs — these ensure that assessment is valid and reliable as well as being pitched at an appropriate standard.
- ◆ Strong delivery and assessment documentation — this is often based on a master folder for each Unit.

Underlying these aspects of good practice is the continued commitment of centre staff to Units in this verification group and the conscientious approach taken to delivery and assessment.

### **Further development**

Further development in part involves maintaining and extending the good practice identified above. External Verifiers also drew attention to the following:

- 1 Developing detailed marking guidelines to assess candidate work — guidance on making assessment judgements is included in exemplar assessment packs, but it is often broad and does not cover all aspects of assessor judgement. Internal verification and local standardisation meetings can help centres to interpret guidelines. It can be useful to refer to the relevant SCQF generic level descriptor when doing this as this can help to ensure that assessment judgements are pitched at the right level for the Unit. The results of these activities can be retained by amending and extending the marking guidelines. It is possible also to retain past scripts to exemplify assessment judgements. In this way, consistent assessment standards can be applied over time. It also provides a mechanism for resolving particularly difficult assessment decisions and for giving feedback to candidates.
- 2 Taking account of feedback from internal verification — strong IV activity was noted as an element of good practice, but there seem to be instances where centre systems mean that comments from IVs can be ignored. Internal verification is a key part of quality assurance and, as noted in (1) above, is important in developing extended marking guidelines which can help to ensure that appropriate assessor judgements are made.
- 3 Using alternative assessments for re-assessment — exemplar assessment packs provide only one instrument of assessment which means that centres must develop alternative assessment instruments for candidates who are require re-assessment. These alternative assessment instruments can be sent to SQA for prior verification, and centres are advised to make use of this facility.

All the visits in this verification group have confirmed that Units are being assessed in a suitable way. Staff involved in delivering, assessing and internally verifying these Units appear to be well aware of what is required of them, which is good to see.

# Higher National Graded Units

## Titles/levels of HN Graded Units verified

DW 2X 34: HNC Management Graded Unit

### Feedback to centres

#### General comments

This Graded Unit is still relatively new and this was only the second occasion on which it has been externally verified. All verification involved an EV visit. Again, the number of visits was small but all indications are that centres have developed their practice from last year and are delivering the Graded Unit in an effective way.

External verification was largely concentrated on the planning and implementation stages of the Graded Unit. Encouragingly, appropriate assessment judgements for a Unit at SCQF level 7 had been made with perhaps a slight tendency towards leniency. Several positive trends were clear, including ones apparent from the first presentation. They include:

- ◆ Good choice and range of topics for the practical assignment in the Graded Unit — it was clear that candidates chose topics of value to themselves and to their chosen organisation, which was not always their current employer. This did help candidates meet the requirements of the Graded Unit.
- ◆ Making use of the exemplar assessment pack — this also helps to ensure candidates follow a clear route through the Graded Unit.
- ◆ Emphasising the importance of the planning stage for the Graded Unit and spending time to make sure that candidates got this right — this makes it much easier for candidates to successfully complete the remaining two stages of the Graded Unit, as well as providing a clear timetable for the work that has to be done.
- ◆ Ensuring that candidates presented their work in accordance with the headings set out in the Graded Unit specification — this makes the assessment and IV processes much more straightforward and gives candidates a clear template for setting out their work. It also ensures that all parts of the Graded Unit specification are covered.

It was clear from verification also that staff at centres have been working hard at this Graded Unit. There were examples of excellent assessor feedback and of careful cross marking, often using checklists based on the Graded Unit marking scheme. This is encouraging especially when it is coupled with the developments resulting from last year's experience. It appears also that candidates are benefiting from the experience of the Graded Unit and this, too, reflects well on those involved in its delivery.

Perhaps the main issue is the importance of making sure that candidates do achieve a standard which matches SCQF level 7 and that assessment judgements are pitched at this level. In particular, this means ensuring that candidates support statements that they make with reasons and evidence. Units which make up the HNC Management provide the theoretical background which can help candidates both give reasons and decide what constitutes suitable supporting evidence. It is important, therefore, that candidates bear this in mind and set the Graded Unit in the context of the HNC Management as a whole.

## **Advice on good practice and areas for further development**

### **Good practice**

Some instances of good practice have already been highlighted but they deserve specific mention in this section. Good practice evident in Graded Unit visits included:

- ◆ Cross marking of candidate work and meaningful discussion and resolution of discrepancies.
- ◆ Using individual marking sheets for each candidate — which helps identify differences between markers and ensures that all aspects of the marking guidelines in the Unit specification are followed; they also provide a mechanism for comments to explain assessment decisions which can help in resolving any differences between markers.
- ◆ Using a script from the previous cohort to benchmark current scripts — this helps to ensure that development points from the first year's experience are taken into account as well as helping to produce consistent assessment judgements.
- ◆ Detailed advice and feedback given to candidates — from choice of topic through to presentation of work.
- ◆ A good range of topics for the Graded Unit.

### **Further development**

Further development can come from extending the good practice above. There are also some specific points which centres may wish to consider for this Graded Unit. They are listed below. Some are points which were made in last year's report. The list is intended to help centres identify development needs which may need to be tackled. Not all points apply to all centres but considering the following may help a centre focus on those issues which are most important to its particular situation.

- 1 Making sure that candidates provide support for points which they make in their reports for the Graded Unit — this can take the form of reasons to back up points in the report but also covers supporting documentary evidence such as development plans which could be presented in appendices. Reasons and evidence can confirm the authenticity and robustness of statements made, as well as ensuring that candidate work is appropriate for SCQF level 7. This can also help to address the possible leniency in the marking of the work of some candidates.
- 2 Make use of marking checklists which enable assessors to comment on their decisions and explain why marks have (or have not) been awarded (page 33 of the exemplar assessment pack for the Graded Unit has a table which could be used for this purpose) — this can help to ensure that (1) above is met and that assessor judgements are pitched at SCQF level 7.
- 3 Ensure that the work that candidates undertake for the Graded Unit is based on other Units in the HNC Management — these can be used to provide theories and models which can be applied in the Graded Unit and/or which can be used to provide supporting reasons as well as helping candidates to devise suitable criteria for their practical assignment. Centres may wish, therefore, to emphasise the relationship between the Graded Unit and other Units in the HNC Management.

- 4 Encourage candidates to focus on their own personal development — enhancing individual managerial effectiveness is a major purpose of the Graded Unit and emphasising this may help candidates to link together the three stages of the Graded Unit, eg personal objective in the planning stage and the evaluation. This may help candidates to provide reasons for statements they make and to provide other supporting evidence. It may help to enhance the overall coherence of their work. It may help also to ensure that, where a candidate works as part of a team, s/he clearly identifies her/his individual responsibilities and actions.

The HNC Management Graded Unit appears to be developing well. Lessons from the first year are being learned as centres become more familiar with what is required. This reflects well on the centre staff involved. Further progress can still be made but this year's external verification suggests that EV visits in 2009–2010 will see improvements as the willingness and motivation to make them is clearly there.