

Research and Information Services

MONITORING STANDARDS DIGEST



Monitoring Standards Digest 2007

SQA

Contents

1 Introduction	3
2 About the monitoring programme	4
The process	5
Dissemination	5
3 Qualifications sampled	6
4 Key findings	7
National Courses	7
Higher National Qualifications	8
5 Recommendations	9
Recommendations for SQA	9
Recommendations for centres	9
6 SQA Response to Recommendations in 2006	10
Appendix: Entries and awards data	15
National Qualifications	15
Higher National Certificate	16

1. Introduction

SQA has been carrying out an annual monitoring standards programme since 1998. This exercise plays a very important role in ensuring that we continue to offer qualifications of a consistently high standard, and we greatly appreciate the role played by colleges and training providers in helping us carry out the HN/SVQ aspect of this work.

This is the second year that SQA has produced an Annual Monitoring Standards Digest, which brings together the main conclusions of the monitoring standards programme. Overall, the key findings from the 2007 programme are positive, but areas for improvement have been highlighted in the HN qualifications for both SQA and Centres and these will be discussed further later on in the report.

I trust that you will find this Digest useful. You will find more detailed subject reports for each of the qualifications listed in section 3 of this publication on the NQ, HN and Research and Information Services pages of our website: **www.sqa.org.uk**.

2. About the monitoring programme

Each year, since 1998, we have been monitoring a sample of qualifications to gauge how accurately and consistently standards are being interpreted and applied (or ‘maintained’) over time. We do this by selecting a sample of National, Higher National and Scottish Vocational Qualifications to monitor, based on the following factors:

- ◆ qualifications which have been monitored in the past – and for which we have archived evidence (which provides the ‘over time’ element)
- ◆ recommendations and suggestions from qualifications development colleagues
- ◆ recommendations arising from any previous year’s monitoring exercise

National Qualifications

The material we use is available centrally in SQA and, where possible, the results for internally assessed components are provided along with uptake by year groups (where this is appropriate).

The material consists of:

- ◆ Course arrangements documents which describe the syllabus content of the qualification
- ◆ SQA external examination papers which are the assessments for National Courses and marking guidelines
- ◆ three candidates’ scripts for each of these categories:
 - closest to the minimum mark for an A band 2
 - closest to the minimum mark for a B band 3
 - closest to the minimum mark for a C band 6
 - the minimum mark for a D

Monitoring teams also receive the grade boundary marks for appropriate subjects and levels and age and stage uptake statistics.

Higher National and Scottish Vocational Qualifications

Centres with candidates taking the units in the sample are asked to submit assessment material, marking guidelines and the work of two candidates who have been awarded a pass and whose evidence, as far as possible, exemplifies the standard for the qualification. The HN Unit specifications and SVQ standards are made available to the scrutiny panels.

NQ Monitoring Teams

As a general principle, teams consist of one SQA expert, a teacher and one external expert.

In practice this means teams are composed of a Principal Assessor (PA), a practising teacher (who can be a marker for SQA) and an external subject expert recruited from universities, colleges, or professional organisations. Teams are chaired by the external subject expert

(mostly from a university), assisted by the PA whose expertise ensures that the report contains accurate information about the subject and the third member is a teacher.

Scrutiny Panels

For Higher National and Scottish Vocational Qualifications, panels are chaired by a verifier (mostly the Senior Verifier) and normally consist of at least one other verifier and, where possible, an external specialist in the vocational or occupational area from further or higher education or from employment in a related sector.

The process

National Courses' teams judge whether changes in the arrangements, question papers, and marking guidelines have made the standard more or less demanding or have left the overall level of demand unchanged. In 2007 Monitoring Standards, scripts for Intermediate 2, Intermediate 1 and Standard Grade subjects were included and comparison made with archived evidence which had been awarded the same grade, in order to gauge whether they could be considered to demonstrate the same level of achievement. Selected Higher and Advanced Higher subjects have been included in previous years' monitoring standards programs.

HN Scrutiny panels judge how effectively centres are interpreting, applying and maintaining the qualifications standards. The panels are asked to focus on the level of demand of assessment instruments and the accuracy and consistency of assessment decisions made by centres. They are also asked to record in their professional opinion, whether assessment standards are being maintained as rigorously or more/less rigorously than the comparator year where archived evidence was available for scrutiny. SVQs have been included in the monitoring standards program in previous years'

Dissemination

Overall results of this year's monitoring activity are being disseminated via this Digest. Detailed subject specific reports are posted on the Research and Information Services section of SQA's website and appear under the Monitoring Standards heading. They are also available on the NQ and HN pages of the website.

3. Qualifications sampled

National Qualifications

NQ Monitoring teams were asked to compare evidence from selected Intermediate 2 and Intermediate 1 exams in the 2006 diet with archived evidence from appropriate years.

At Standard Grade, the years used for the comparison were 1998 and 2006, with subjects selected from the Mathematics, Science, Technology and Social Studies groupings.

The subjects involved are:

Intermediate 2 2006 and 2002

- ◆ Mathematics

Intermediate 1 2006 and 2002

- ◆ Mathematics

Intermediate 1 2003, 2005 and 2006

- ◆ Administration

Standard Grade 2006 and 1998

- ◆ Biology
- ◆ Chemistry
- ◆ Physics
- ◆ Mathematics
- ◆ Computing Studies

Higher National Qualifications

Evidence was requested from centres for Units from the following HN qualifications:

Higher National Certificate

- ◆ Accounting
- ◆ Social Care
- ◆ Social Sciences

Higher National Diploma

- ◆ Social Sciences

Standards from 2007 were compared to those from 2003 where archived evidence was available.

4. Key findings

National Courses

Intermediate 2

Mathematics was the only Intermediate 2 subject included in the monitoring standards program in 2007. There were no changes to the arrangements and there was no difference in level of demand in the marking instructions. The monitoring team considered the question paper to be marginally more difficult in 2006 but they also decided slightly less evidence was required for candidates to gain A and C Grades in 2006. Overall they concluded that the level of demand was similar in 2006 and 2002.

Intermediate 1

Mathematics and Administration were included this year. The years for comparison for Mathematics were 2006 and 2002 and the team considered the level of demand to be comparable and noted the greater clarity in the marking instructions. Overall the level of demand was very similar. The 2006 arrangements and question paper for Administration were considered to be broader and deeper in demand in comparison to 2005 and 2003 indicating that the level of demand has increased. However the team concluded that Grade A-C candidate performance was comparable across the years.

Standard Grade

Biology arrangements were unchanged in 2006 with the level of demand of the question papers remaining comparable. The Biology team's conclusions were that there was no difference in demand in the marking instructions and that evidence of candidate performance for Biology was similar in both years. Overall the level of demand was comparable.

The arrangements for Chemistry remained the same across both years and the level of demand of the question papers remained unchanged. Marking instructions for Chemistry were noted to be markedly more detailed which the team considered to be of benefit to candidates with poorer performance who were now being credited appropriately. However the level of demand had not altered. Candidate performance was deemed to be slightly better in 2006 compared to 1998.

The Physics team reported that the arrangements were unchanged from 1998 and the difficulty level of the question papers was comparable although the improved style of the paper in 2006 made it more accessible. Minor changes and improvements to marking instructions were also commented on by the Physics team. Although the performance of candidates at Grades 1-4 was comparable between 2006 and 1998 the team considered that the 2006 candidates showed better understanding and improved performance in questions which required explanation from them. Their conclusion was that overall the level of demand has remained comparable.

The Mathematics team considered the arrangements to be more extensive but did not detect any change in demand. The change to the structure of the exam was not considered to have altered the level of demand and similarly the greater clarity and guidance in the marking instructions was not seen as altering the difficulty level. Candidate performance was comparable across the years.

The increase in content in the Computing Studies arrangements has made the syllabus more demanding and has led to a wider knowledge base being required to answer the 2006 question paper. However the team reported that this had no effect on the level of demand of the questions. Coverage of the syllabus in the 2006 Question Paper was less comprehensive because there was more content from which to sample. The team considered that increased clarity made the question paper more accessible and that marking instructions have also been improved. A perceived weakness of the new arrangements and examination instrument noted by the team is considered to be the amount of new material added primarily at Foundation level with 10% of former Foundation material moving up to the General level and 6% of General material moving up to Credit level. There was concern that the weakest candidates were being disadvantaged because they had to absorb more new material. From the sampled candidates, quality of understanding appears comparable across the years as does the depth of knowledge and language demonstrated.

Higher National Qualifications

In general the Social Care scrutiny panel was satisfied that the evidence produced by candidates was of a good standard across centres and that where comparison over years was possible, standards were being maintained. Specific concerns raised by the panel are indicated in the Recommendations for Centres section. Where centres have designed integrated assessments in line with the arrangements document, the standard of these was considered to be very good. The panel noted evidence of good practice with some excellent examples of feedback to candidates.

The Accounting Scrutiny panel reported that candidates were well prepared, that assessment evidence presented by centres was fairly standard where the exemplar material issued by SQA had been used and that most of the assessment decisions were accurate and appropriate. The panel raised a few issues which concerned them and these are mentioned in section 5 - Recommendations for Centres.

The evidence received from centres for HNC and HND Social Sciences was of insufficient quantity for the scrutiny team to meet or form a judgement.

5. Recommendations

Recommendations for SQA

For HNC Accounting

- ◆ The current framework is appropriate to maintain standards but some minor adjustments could be made to make it easier to manage.
- ◆ Some of the assessment exemplars in their present form are past their sell-by-date and it is a possibility that those issued in the first batch of exemplars may well by now be in the public domain, and for candidates determined to look, may be easily found.
- ◆ One suggestion may be to issue electronic versions of assessment instruments which are prepared on a spreadsheet which would make the preparation of alternatives much easier. The assessments in Management Accounting using IT are a very good example whereby input pages can be prepared and then individual elements of each assessment task can be amended to make a different assessment instrument more easily developed, with emphasis being easily shifted.

Recommendations for centres

- ◆ Develop correct procedure for marking showing an audit trail and observe consequential marking procedure.
- ◆ Discourage candidates from completing assessments in pencil and always mark candidate assessments in red pen.
- ◆ Make use of the Prior Verification service offered by SQA to ensure standards in centre devised assessments are consistent.
- ◆ Provide written information to candidates on the conditions of assessment and marks required to achieve a pass.
- ◆ Ensure conditions of assessment adhere to the Unit Specification requirements.
- ◆ Ensure current versions of assessment exemplars are used.

Recommendations for SQA

For HNC Social Care

- ◆ Verification visits to colleges and to non college centres delivering the HNC be increased
- ◆ Colleges be encouraged to follow an integrated pathway for assessment
- ◆ The issues identified here be shared with the HNC verification team and the Quality Support Team for the award

Recommendations for centres

- ◆ Revisit integration of assessments within Units and across Units.
- ◆ Share successful methods of integration of Units with External Verifiers during visits.
- ◆ Develop a protocol for over reliance on web based materials from limited sources.

- ◆ Provide clear guidance to candidates on their remediation policy and procedure.

6. SQA Response to Recommendations in 2006

National Courses

The NQ Physics team recommended that SQA investigate the process of script selection for monitoring purposes to determine whether or not it is representative.

Response: *The issue has been investigated and a warning along the following lines has been included in guidance for panels.*

“The selected scripts are not meant to be representative of all scripts at a certain grade. The selected scripts exemplify borderline candidates. They are scripts of candidates with the lowest mark in the same grade in each of the components. In reality, scripts do not always conform to this pattern, because candidates may do much better in one component than in another. In addition, the selection is too small to draw any general conclusions.”

Higher National Qualifications

HNC Construction (G075)

- ◆ Giving this HNC a higher profile for external verification activity next session. Verifiers should be made aware of the general issues raised in the key findings in this Digest, with training to address them.

Response: *As this is an “old award” external verification activity is on a 3 year cycle. HNC Construction is currently being scoped for review with the outcome expected early in 2008. Dependant on findings, this could lead to a 2 year staged development plan for implementation in 2010. Verifiers would be involved with the scoping exercise and discussion at Cognate group meetings informs everyone of general issues raised. New Awards would be given training priority.*

- ◆ Developing quality assured, standardised exemplar assessment materials to be distributed to centres.

Response: *Guidance on assessment material for this “old award” is available directly from EVs. Resources will be used for developing exemplar assessment material for new awards.*

HNC Engineering: Electrical (G0DR 15)

- ◆ Repeating the monitoring standards exercise in two years on the equivalent four Units (two years is considered a reasonable timescale given the issues raised in this Digest and the introduction of new HN Electrical Units as part of the re-validation of the HNC and HND in Electrical Engineering under SQA’s new Design Principles).

Response:

Monitoring Standards in a Qualification is not undertaken every two years. This allows other awards to be included in the programme in the intervening years.

- ◆ Deploying Electrical external verifiers to check centres' assessment policies (as part of this year's external verification activities), especially with regard to the conditions of assessment. Verifiers should report their findings to the Senior Verifier so that he or she can include comments on these policies in his or her annual report.

Response:

EVs do this as part of their normal EV activity as per the instructions of the Verification Section in SQA. Team members reported back to the Senior EV and included in general terms in the overall report he submitted for session 2006/7

- ◆ Ensuring that all exemplar assessment materials for the core Units in the new HNC and HND Electrical Engineering awards are available by August 2007.

Response:

This has been completed.

- ◆ Making sure that rigorous external verification processes are applied to both the HNC Electrical Engineering Graded Unit examination and the HND double-credit Graded Unit project.

Response:

A Central Verification Event was held in June 2007 to verify the HNC Graded Unit (exam) delivered by centres in session 2006/7. A similar event was held to verify the HND Graded Unit (project). It was requested that all delivering centres be verified and all were. Rigour was in accord with guidelines laid down by the Verification Section and SQA policy.

- ◆ Ensuring that monitoring standards is a regular item on Electrical Engineering Qualifications Support Team meetings.

Response:

Monitoring Standards does not appear as a unique item on the agenda for the HN Electrical QST but this underpins the ethos of everything the QST does. The QST meets quarterly and the normal business of each meeting focuses on ensuring national standards are monitored and maintained for Units and Graded Units which fall under its remit and that best practice is shared and cascaded across delivering centres.

- ◆ Seeking to get monitoring standards as an item on the agenda of a not-too-distant Scottish Association for Engineering Education (SAFE) conference.

Response:

SQA has a standing slot on the agenda of SAFE's Annual Conference. In the year in which the formal "Monitoring Standards Exercise" is conducted (in this case 2006) the outcome is shared with SAFE members at the next Conference. This is more appropriate than requesting that this topic becomes a full agenda item.

NB – in the year in which the exercise is conducted, the outcome of the scrutiny is also shared with the HN Electrical QST and with the Sector Panel for Engineering, Science and Maths.

HNC Applied Science (G7V9)

- ◆ providing on-going advice, guidance and feedback and development visits to centres to cover:

- assessment of the Graded Unit
- plagiarism in assessment
- referencing
- signposting criteria
- integration of units

Response:

All of the recommendations have been actioned and would have been, even if the scrutiny had not taken place as they are an integral part of the work of the HN Sciences QST which meets 3 to 4 times a year. The Graded Unit and Assessment Exemplar for the HNC were revised for use in session 2006/7 and have been revised again slightly for use in session 2008/9 to provide more helpful advice and guidance to delivering centres.

Integrating assessments across units is an issue that is discussed at QST meetings.

Scottish Vocational Qualifications

SVQ Hairdressing Level 2 (G77N 22)

- ◆ Making portfolios available online so that centres can access these as they are required — currently the Standard Setting Body (SSB) number appears on the portfolio, and sometimes there is confusion between this and the SQA unit number.

Response: *The portfolio is the recording document created by SQA and centres can have this provided electronically on request. The SSB – Habia has a number on the portfolio which is clearly shown as different from the SQA number. The numbers are necessary in order to refer to the standards which are owned by Habia. This is normal SQA practice to include both codes and is considered an aid to candidates who which to have direct references to the standards.*

- ◆ Making electronic versions of the standards available so centres can purchase them when they have a student starting the course.

Response: *The standards are owned by the SSB – Habia and can be purchased directly from them. They are also available to download from the UK Standards website.*

- ◆ Creating a template which can be used to cross reference evidence requirements across units. This would facilitate integration of assessment.

Response: *This is being developed by the External Verification team for SVQ Hair.*

- ◆ Creating a template to assist centres to allocate marks clearly and appropriately in assessments

Response: *This is being developed by the External Verification team for SVQ Hair*

- ◆ Creating a weighting template for centres to use for all written assessments

Response: *This is being developed by the External Verification team for SVQ Hair*

- ◆ Ensuring that all cases of good practices are shared and, where necessary, adapted to enable centres to develop and ensure standardisation throughout the sector.

Response: *Good practice is highlighted via the Senior External Verification Reports placed on the SQA website. The Cognate group for External Verifiers share good practice and ensure standardisation during their visits to centres. Quality Network and Consortium meetings also share good practice and provide opportunities to ensure standardisation.*

SVQ Retail Operations Level 2 (G6PP)

- ◆ Ensuring that more evidence is available for monitoring purposes, if possible, the next time this exercise is carried out. We believe this would allow the panel to make a better comparison.

Response:

Centres moved quickly onto the new standards and SVQs (which they felt were a big improvement) therefore it would not have been feasible to do a further exercise on the old versions because there would have been insufficient material.

- ◆ Ensuring the recording methods used by centres are fit for purpose in all cases.

Response:

SQA have had enhanced quality network activity, led by external verifiers, to support the introduction of the revised SVQs and this has included issues surrounding recording documentation

- ◆ Possibly carrying out another monitoring exercise before the current (2002) standards expire, to enable a like-for-like comparison.

Response:

As mentioned previously, insufficient material will be available due to centres moving onto new standards.

SVQ Management Level 4 (old G4GB 24) SVQ Management Level 4 (new G81R 24)

- ◆ Emphasising the importance to centres of getting candidates to show how the evidence they submit enables them to meet the requirements of the standards — this means stressing the importance of reflective accounts, professional discussion and annotation of evidence. Reflective accounts and professional discussion should refer directly to relevant items of evidence while annotations should indicate which parts of the standards the item of evidence relates to.

Response:

The Assessment Guidance developed for the SVQs in Management includes a section which emphasizes the importance of ensuring that candidates show how their evidence meets the standards. This was also emphasized at the SVQ Quality Network meeting which was attended by over 100 Assessors and Internal Verifiers. In addition, the Senior Verifier discussed the issue with the Verifiers at the SVQ Management Verification Group meeting.

- ◆ Emphasising that candidates should take ‘ownership’ of their own portfolios and that, at level 4, assessors should avoid ‘leading’ candidates to the extent that the assessor may be doing work which should really be done by the candidate.

Response:

This was also raised at the Quality Network meeting and Verification Group meeting...

- ◆ Providing guidance on interpreting the knowledge requirements of the new standards.

Response:

SQA has developed additional guidance which covers the knowledge requirements of the mandatory Units of Levels 3 and 4. The External Verifiers and approved Management centres were made aware of the guidance which is available to download from SQA's website. Feed back on the guidance has been positive.

All of this could be achieved by advice from external verifiers during EV visits and by Quality Network and other meetings of centre representatives

Appendix: Entries and awards data

National Qualifications

Entries and Awards data for NQ subjects included in this digest are:

1 Intermediate 2

Intermediate 2	Entries 2002	%Passes 2002	% Total entries 2002	Entries 2006	% Passes 2006	% Total entries 2006
Mathematics	12527	60%	18.6%	16789	63%	17.7%
All Subjects	67509	71%		94686	74%	

2 Intermediate 1

Intermediate 1	Entries 2002	%Passes 2002	% Total entries 2002	Entries 2006	% Passes 2006	% Total entries 2006
Mathematics	5070	49%	24.9%	10,317	62%	50.7%
All Subjects	20352	65%		45174	72%	

3 Intermediate 1

Intermediate 1	Entries 2003	%Passes 2003	% Total entries 2003	Entries 2005	%Passes 2005	% Total entries 2005	Entries 2006	%Passes 2006	% Total entries 2006
Administration	1048	86%	4.3%	976	85%	2.7%	1371	87%	3%
All Subjects	24613	66%		36653	69%		45174	72%	

4 Standard Grade

Standard Grade	Entries 1998	%Awards 1998			% Total entries 1998	Entries 2006	%Awards 2006			% Total entries 2006
		1-2	3-4	5-6			1-2	3-4	5-6	
Biology	22055	56	37	17	4.6%	23200	52	35	12	5.8%
Chemistry	22744	64	30	4	4.8%	20688	58	34	5	5%
Physics	19133	33	29	4	4%	17064	61	31	7	4.1%
Mathematics	59683	30	38	27	12.6%	53782	32	39	27	12.9%
Computing Studies	18266	40	40	16	3.8%	16508	46	38	13	4%
All Subjects	475507	39	42	13		416052	46	40	11	

Higher National Qualifications

product details			2005		2006		2007		2008		total	
code	level	title	entries	awards								
G7D1	15	Accounting	144	22	544	218	672	397	49	58	1,409	695
G7ME	15	Social Care	82	0	1,569	230	1,650	1,264	83	278	3,384	1,772
HNC Totals			19,496	10,397	18,524	11,852	17,819	12,631	1,126	2,332	56,965	37,212