

Research and Information Services

Monitoring Standards Digest



Monitoring Standards Digest 2008

1 Introduction

SQA has been carrying out an annual standards monitoring programme since 1998. This exercise plays a very important role in ensuring that we continue to offer qualifications of a consistently high standard. We greatly appreciate the role played by colleges and training providers in helping us carry out the HN/SVQ aspect of this work and acknowledgement of their endeavours is due all to Principal Assessors, Senior Verifiers, Verifiers, Teachers, Higher Education and Industry/occupational sector experts who participate in the Monitoring Standards events.

This third Annual Monitoring Standards Digest brings together the main conclusions of the monitoring standards programme. Overall, the key findings from the 2008 programme are positive, but areas for improvement have been highlighted in the HN qualifications for both SQA and centres — these are detailed further on in the report.

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 maintained over time. We do this by selecting a sample of National, Higher National and Scottish Vocational Qualifications to monitor. The selection is based on:

- ◆ qualifications that 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

The monitoring teams also receive the grade boundary marks for their subjects and levels, and age and stage uptake statistics.

Higher National Qualifications and Scottish Vocational Qualifications

Centres with candidates in the sample are asked to submit assessment material, marking guidelines, instructions to candidates, internal verification forms 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.

How monitoring is carried out

National Courses' teams judge whether changes in the arrangements, question papers, and marking instructions have made the standard more or less demanding or have left the overall level of demand unchanged. In 2008 Monitoring Standards, scripts for Higher and Intermediate 2 subjects were compared with archived evidence that had been awarded the same grade. The object was to gauge whether they demonstrated the same level of achievement. Advanced Higher, Intermediate 1 and Standard Grade 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 the assessment instruments, and on the accuracy and consistency of the assessment decisions made by centres. They are also asked to record their professional opinion on whether assessment standards are being maintained as rigorously as in the comparator year.

SVQs have been included in the monitoring standards programme in previous years.

Publishing the results

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

3 Qualifications sampled

National Qualifications

NQ Monitoring teams were asked to compare evidence from selected Intermediate 2 and Higher exams with archived evidence from appropriate years.

The years used for comparison are indicated below, with subjects selected from Business, Languages and Social Studies.

The subjects involved are:

Intermediate 2 2006 and 2004

- ◆ Geography

Intermediate 2 2007, 2006 and 2003

- ◆ History
- ◆ Business Management

Higher 2007 and 2005

- ◆ Gaelic (Learners)
- ◆ Gaidhlig

Higher 2006 and 2002

- ◆ Religious Moral and Philosophical Studies

Higher National Qualifications

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

Higher National Certificate

- ◆ Administration and Information Technology
- ◆ Computing
- ◆ Early Education and Childcare
- ◆ Social Sciences

Higher National Diploma

- ◆ Business
- ◆ Sports Coaching with Development of Sport
- ◆ Travel and Tourism

Standards from 2008 were compared to those from previous years where archived evidence was available.

4 Key findings

National Courses

Higher (SCQF Level 6)

For Gaelic(Learners) the monitoring team considered the level of demand of Arrangements, Question Papers and Marking Instructions to be broadly similar in both years (2007 and 2005) and where comparable, grading of scripts was broadly similar. The syllabus has undergone considerable change and the monitoring team agreed that the new Arrangements had produced a more robust, consistent and reliable assessment of student competencies whilst the overall the level of demand has not significantly changed.

For Gaidhlig Higher evidence from 2007 and 2005 was compared and the monitoring team considered the changes to the syllabus to have resulted in a broadly similar level of demand but a much more robust assessment package providing a more accurate picture of student ability in 2007. The demand and grading of scripts was similar in both years but with greater emphasis on external assessment, it was effectively more difficult for students to achieve an A Grade in 2007. However the monitoring team concluded that the overall level of demand for Gaidhlig Higher has remained more or less unchanged.

In Religious Moral and Philosophical Studies the monitoring team found the overall level of demand in the Arrangements to be slightly greater in 2006 compared to 2002. Greater coverage of the breadth of the syllabus has resulted in the 2006 assessment tasks being as demanding as in 2002. Comparison was made more difficult by the changes in the nature of the exam and overall the team agreed it was more demanding for C Grade candidates. The removal of the Extended Essay from the 2006 assessment produced a more robust exam instrument and provided a more accurate gauge of candidates' ability.

Intermediate 2 (SCQF Level 5)

Despite changes in the Geography Arrangements from 2004 to 2006 there is broad similarity between the two years. The structure of the examination papers changed significantly between these years and although the 2006 question paper may appear to be more demanding, the monitoring team considered the difficulty and challenge of questions to be comparable as is the standard of performance displayed in candidate scripts. Overall the level of demand is comparable across both the years.

The monitoring team reported that there has been no change to the level of demand in the Arrangements for History across the years 2003, 2006 and 2007. The structure of the examination paper has not changed and although the questions had become homogeneous in 2007, the level of demand has not altered. Overall there was no evidence to suggest that standards have changed to any significant degree.

The monitoring team for Business Management also found no evidence of a notable change in demand across the years 2003, 2006 and 2007. Despite greater syllabus coverage giving slightly more breadth but correspondingly less depth, the overall level of demand was unaffected. For each relevant Grade, scripts were of comparable value over

all three years, with grade boundary marks remaining identical in the years for comparison.

Higher National Qualifications

HNC (SCQF Level 7)

The panel for HNC Administration and Information Technology found that most centres used SQA Assessment Exemplar Packs to assess candidates. The assessments were set at the appropriate level (SCQF Level 7) and they found that students had generally produced work to that level. On the whole, the panel agreed with the assessment decisions made. Although the subject matter in some units is broadly similar to units from Administration and Information Management in the comparator year 2005, direct comparison could not be made. The general conclusion of the panel is that the new framework is upholding standards at SCQF Level 7.

Overall, the HNC Computing panel found that assessment instruments were fit for purpose, providing a realistic and appropriate level of assessment demand for candidates. On the whole, the assessment decisions made by centres were felt to be accurate and consistent over time. The panel considered that, due to changes in assessment and content of the curriculum as part of the HN Modernisation programme, the level of challenge on the whole has gone down over time in the units scrutinised. However the content and assessment is now considered appropriate for the level of the award (SCQF Level 7) and where the subject matter has remained the same, standards have been maintained.

The HNC Early Education and Childcare panel found that the level of demand of the new qualification is greater than in the comparator year. The evidence requirements are now more in depth so in general most assessment instruments for assessing at SCQF level 7 are sufficiently demanding. A direct comparison between current Units and those in the comparator year 2003 was not possible. Although many centres are interpreting and applying the standards acceptably there are issues relating to remediation and reassessment.

In HNC Social Sciences the arrangements were considered to be as rigorous as previous HN Social Science awards. The level of demand was deemed to be appropriate for Unit assessments at SCQF level 7. In the main evidence requirements were interpreted with a degree of standardisation across centres but the panel found that issues were evident with the interpretation of remediation/reassessment requirements.

HND (SCQF Level 8)

In general the assessment instruments that have been used in HND Business are sufficiently demanding for assessing units at SCQF levels 7 and 8. There was widespread use of remediation and less evidence of the use of complete reassessment and there were few examples identifying the point at which a candidate should be reassessed in entirety rather than remediated. A direct comparison was not possible between current units and

those in the comparator year 2004 but a general comparison was made against candidate evidence from units contained within the old framework and the panel concluded that standards demanded are generally slightly higher in some components within the new units.

Although the Units reviewed for HND Sports Coaching with Development of Sport were not the same as those scrutinised during a previous exercise in 2005, there were many similarities and after comparison the panel considered that assessment standards had been less rigorously applied in 2008. There is evidence to suggest that although the Unit standards have not changed, centres have relaxed their vigilance and the marking standard is less than it previously had been. It was also noted that not all assessors were familiar with the current National Occupational Standards required by the Coaching Industry and were assessing to standards which may well have been below the SCQF level of the Unit requirements. Although the Arrangements Document is widely available and the Units show clearly what is required, the quality of evidence shows variation between centres and within centres and this concern needs to be addressed.

The HND Travel and Tourism panel concluded that based on the limited evidence of two units, standards are being upheld at the relevant SCQF levels. Subject matter remained largely unchanged in the Marketing Planning in Travel and Tourism unit and the panel agreed that the standard was generally consistent with 2002 evidence. Comparison between years for International Tourist Destinations was difficult as the content and evidence requirements had changed and the application of standards in marking this unit was very variable.

5 Recommendations

HNC Administration and Information Technology

Recommendations for SQA

- ◆ SQA should continue to disseminate information on good practice found at the Monitoring Standards Event.

Initial Response

SQA will continue to disseminate information on good practice. Monitoring Standards reports will continue to be posted on appropriate pages on the website

Recommendations for centres

- ◆ Centres should work with SQA to enhance and further develop assessment material for the units sampled.
- ◆ Centres should consider integration of assessments between units, to reduce the assessment burden on candidates. This approach could also improve candidate performance in graded unit examinations.

HNC Computing

Recommendations for SQA

- ◆ In future when choosing Units for scrutiny, the uptake should be sufficiently large to make the sample size valid for comparison purposes.

Initial Response

SQA notes the recommendation for the next time the HNC in Computing is selected for standard monitoring and this will be taken to QST for their consideration.

Recommendations for centres

It is recommended that centres continue to work to improve standards of assessment, including:

- ◆ Providing feedback to candidates
- ◆ Ensuring that internal verification procedures are in place
- ◆ Detailing of conditions assessment and criteria of achievement

HNC Early Education and Childcare

Recommendations for SQA

- ◆ Conditions for assessment and criteria for a pass at the beginning of each assessment instrument.
- ◆ SQA should investigate ways in which it can support centres in further in developing assessments.

Initial Response

We will review the way in which we specify conditions for assessment and pass criteria within assessments. The SQA will continue to support centres to develop assessment.

Recommendations for centres

- ◆ It is recommended that centres continue to work to improve standards of assessment, including:
 - Providing appropriate feedback for candidates
 - Ensuring that internal verification procedures are in place.
 - Disseminating information from SQA to all appropriate staff.

HNC Social Sciences

Recommendations for SQA

- ◆ SQA should consider the need for further guidance on remediation/re-assessment requirements.

Initial Response

The issue of remediation/re-assessment has now been addressed. Further guidance has been developed by our QST for Social Sciences and will be posted on our web site. In addition, there will be a staff development seminar on 18 November where there will be a presentation and discussion on this with the senior verifier plus other verifiers. Printed guidance will also be issued at this event.

- ◆ SQA should re-visit the HN Social Science assessment strategy embedded within the Unit assessment evidence requirements with an aim to increase the flexibility of permitted responses, taking into account Unit requirements to enable a variety of assessment methods to be used where appropriate and to facilitate innovative assessment practice.

Initial Response

The QST has already begun to discuss the assessment strategy. We undertook a consultation exercise with centres earlier this year and gained some valuable feedback in relation to this. We have some recommendations for revision but review of the assessment strategy will take place as part of the overall review of the HNC/D Social Sciences which will take place between April 2009 and March 2011.

- ◆ Based on the team's knowledge that lecturers tend to use and/or conform to exemplar assessment materials, innovative "alternative" exemplar assessments would greatly assist innovative practice.

Initial Response

We have already produced a large amount of exemplar support for this award. In addition we have been working with E-assessment and learning team and SFEU to set up an SQA assessment exemplar "bank". This will consist of exemplars developed by centres and sent in to SQA for sharing with other centres. All of these exemplars will first of all be prior verified by SQA.

Recommendations for centres

None

HND Business

Recommendations for SQA

- ◆ SQA should investigate ways in which it can further assist centres in developing more assessments.

Initial Response

We will discuss the recommendations with the Business Qualifications Support Team to consider what action should be taken within available resources.

Recommendations for centres

- ◆ It is recommended that centres continue to work to improve standards of assessment, including:
 - Providing appropriate feedback for candidates
 - Ensuring that internal verification procedures are in place.
 - Disseminating information from SQA to all appropriate staff.

HND Sports Coaching with Development of Sport

Recommendations for SQA

- ◆ It is recommended that SQA carries through its plan to consider revision of this award as soon as reasonably possible to bring it up to date with huge changes in the sports development industry.

Initial Response

SQA is aware of the need to consider revision of this award to bring it up to date in line with the huge changes that continue to take place in the coaching and sports development industry. SQA has begun this process.

- ◆ It is recommended that SQA ensures that the revision be supported to its conclusion and that this should include revision of Exemplars where necessary.

Initial Response

The varied quality of some of the exemplar material is a known issue and is under active consideration at this time.

- ◆ It is recommended that SQA ensures that there is more External Verification activity for HN Units in this award as soon as possible to support staff to ensure that assessment standards are upheld.

Initial Response

SQA will continue to look at issues relating to external verification of HN Units in this award to ensure that centres are supported in the assessment process.

- ◆ It is recommended that SQA provides, or works with other agencies to provide, CPD for staff on the issue of feedback and assessment.

Initial Response

SQA notes this recommendation and will work with the Qualification Support Team and other agencies to consider ways in which further support can be given within available resources.

Recommendations for centres

- ◆ It is recommended that centres continue to work to improve standards of assessment, including:
 - Providing appropriate feedback for candidates
 - Ensuring that internal verification procedures are in place.

HND Travel and Tourism

Recommendations for SQA

- ◆ SQA should provide further detail on the requirement to “present to industry standards”.

Initial Response

Unit specifications and assessment exemplars will be revisited as relevant national occupational standards are reviewed. The preference is normally to try and built in more specific detail to assessment exemplars as to do so in unit specifications can date them very quickly.

Recommendations for centres

- ◆ Centres should continue to work to improve standards of assessment, including:
 - Providing appropriate feedback for candidates
 - Ensuring that internal verification procedures are in place.
 - Looking at alternative means of assessment, including the possibility of providing video evidence when candidates have made presentations.

6 SQA's responses to recommendations in 2007

Higher National Qualifications

HNC Accounting (G7D1 15)

Recommendation

The current framework is appropriate to maintaining standards, but some minor adjustments could be made to make it easier to manage.

Our response

There is a review of HN Accounting at present, which should address these points.

Recommendation

Some of the assessment exemplars, in their present form, are past their sell-by-date, and it is a possibility that the first batch may well by now be in the public domain. For candidates who are determined to look, these may be easily found.

One suggestion is to issue electronic versions of assessment instruments prepared on a spreadsheet, which would make preparing alternatives much easier. The assessments in Management Accounting using IT are a very good example of this — individual elements of each assessment task can be amended to make a different assessment instrument, with emphasis being easily shifted.

Our response

As part of the present review of HN Accounting, there will be some revision of many of the exemplars. Consideration will be given to the use of spreadsheets where appropriate.

SQA ensures the security of exemplars by placing them on a secure website and centres should also ensure security of materials when used by them.

It may be that some of the information in the exemplars requires to be updated, eg new tax rates or changes to legislation. We would hope that centres would be updating these on an annual basis. The exemplars were written to exemplify standards and may be used as assessments however, centres should ensure they remain dynamic and robust if they are using them on a repeat basis year on year.

HNC Social Care (G7ME 15)

Recommendation

Increase verification visits to colleges and to non-college centres delivering the HNC.

Recommendation

Encourage colleges to follow an integrated pathway for assessment.

Recommendation

Share the issues identified here with the HNC verification team and the Quality Support Team.

Our response

The following is a summary of the actions taken by the Awarding Body as a consequence of the findings of the Monitoring of Standards exercise carried out in 2007.

- ◆ Discussed as an agenda item at the Qualification Support Team Meeting 31st August 2007
- ◆ Discussed at the Verification group Meeting for Social Care 29th September 2007
- ◆ Discussed with the Assessment Standards Manager and Assessment Standards Officer to increase verification visits to colleges
- ◆ Agreed to hold a Quality Network event which took place on 16th November 2007

The Quality Network event and the verification activities were key to addressing the issues raised in the Monitoring of Standards report.

The Senior Verifier met with her team along with the Qualification Manager to highlight the issues raised and to focus verification attention on the areas highlighted.

The Quality Network programme focused on the recommendations for centres with a presentation from the Senior Verifier and a range of workshops delivered by representatives from the Qualifications Support Team and the verification team.

In attendance there were 80 delegates from across Scotland from both College and Training Providers.

Additionally the workshop material and presentations were made available on the Care Scotland pages of SQA Website for those unable to attend.

The Senior Verifier report for 2008 reflected that there had been significant improvement in terms of the number of visits undertaken by the Awarding Body and in terms of the recommendations for centres;

“Together we undertook forty five visits for the HNC and twenty seven visits for the Graded Unit. Visits were made to college and non college centres delivering the HNC in Social Care and looked at the units identified above, the SVQ units in the award and the Graded Units. During our meeting at the start of the session we made the decision to concentrate our verification on Social Care Theory for Practice, one Social Science Unit, the Graded Unit and HSC33 Reflect on and develop your practice. We were particularly looking to see how well centres were integrating their assessments and how candidate work was being used to inform the SVQ units in the core of the award.”

“Overall the standard of work examined was good, meeting the national standards, and compliant with the assessment strategy. No holds on certification were placed on the HNC Social Care. The majority of centres had attended the Quality Network held in November 2007 and had made good use of the workshop materials provided.”

Appendix: Entries and awards data

National Qualifications

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

1 Higher

Higher	Entries 2005	% Passes 2005	% Total entries 2005	Entries 2007	% Passes 2007	% Total entries 2007
Gaelic (Learners)	130	92%	.08%	119	91%	.07%
Gaidhlig	102	100%	.06%	97	97%	.06%
All Subjects	164142	73%		161081	73%	

2 Higher

Higher	Entries 2002	% Passes 2002	% Total entries 2002	Entries 2006	% Passes 2006	% Total entries 2006
RMPS	1596	70%	.09%	1323	66%	.08%
	(X072)			(X213)		
	old			new		
All Subjects	164004	73%		159140	73%	

3 Intermediate 2

Intermediate 2	Entries 2003	% Passes 2003	% Total entries 2003	Entries 2006	% Passes 2006	% Total entries 2006	Entries 2007	% Passes 2007	% Total entries 2007
Business Management	1466	75%	.02%	1971	84%	.02%	2507	83%	.02%
History	2011	71%	.03%	3457	69%	.04%	3980	77%	.04%
All Subjects	72327	72%		94686	74%		10734	77%	
							0		

4 Intermediate 2

Intermediate 2	Entries 2004	% Passes 2004	% Total entries 2004	Entries 2006	% Passes 2006	% Total entries 2006
Geography	1779	71%	.02%	1898	74%	.02%
All Subjects	80283	74%		94686	74%	

Higher National Qualifications

Entries and Awards data for HNC subjects included in this Digest are:

Product details		2006		2007		2008		total	
Code/level	title	entries	awards	entries	awards	entries	awards	entries	awards
G7YV 15	Administration and Information Technology	840	227	1075	624	1044	624	2959	1475
G7GL 15	Computing	993	377	927	526	827	485	2747	1388
G7CX 15	Early Education and Childcare	1223	557	1415	1366	1348	1137	3986	3060
G86F 15	Social Sciences			268	100	697	369	965	469
HNC Totals		18524	11852	17819	12631	17879	11679		

Entries and Awards data for HND subjects included in this Digest are:

Product details		2006		2007		2008		total	
Code/level	title	entries	awards	entries	awards	entries	awards	entries	awards
G7DA 16	Business	325	20	463	122	580	183	1368	325
G81P 16	Sports Coaching with Development of Sport	25		416	21	544	128	985	149
G7MD 16	Travel and Tourism	82		216	28	201	80	499	108
HND Totals		14109	6931	13638	7998	14056	7948		