



Higher National Qualifications

And

Scottish Vocational Qualifications

Senior Verifier Report

2007

Subject: HN Business Graded Unit 390

The purpose of this report is to provide feedback to centres on verification which has taken place within Higher National Graded Units in this subject area.

HIGHER NATIONAL GRADED UNITS

TITLES/LEVELS OF HN GRADED UNITS VERIFIED

DE3T 34 Graded Unit 1 SCQF Level 7
DE3V 35 Graded Unit 2 SCQF Level 8
DE3W 35 Graded Unit 3 SCQF Level 8

FEEDBACK TO CENTRES

General comments:

Verification for all three Units was undertaken centrally. This was the third occasion that Graded Unit 1 had been verified and the second time that Graded Units 2 and 3 had been verified. It is important, therefore, to remember that centres are still in the process of developing their practice in the delivery and assessment of Graded Units. The verification event involved work from a number of centres who were delivering one or more of the Graded Units for the first time.

The main conclusions from verification are, however, very similar to those from the 2006 central verification. In terms of assessment, centres in general were able to apply the standards of SCQF Level 7 for Graded Unit 1 and SCQF Level 8 for Graded Units 2 and 3 to the marking of candidate work. There was evidence that centres are making good use of previous experience with Graded Units and becoming more adept at preparing candidates for them. It was clear that many centres had spent a considerable amount of time and effort in marking work and this is a tribute to their commitment and professionalism. It was particularly encouraging to see that most centres which had successfully delivered Graded Unit 1 last year were able to continue to do this with Graded Units 2 and 3. The standard expected of candidates for these Units is, of course, more demanding but centres did seem to cope well with this. Equally significant was the fact that centres who had encountered difficulties with the Graded Units have been able to respond positively and resolve the various issues which have arisen. The net result was that the vast majority of centres being verified were accepted for verification.

There is no doubt that the Graded Units are a significant challenge for candidates. Most candidates were able to rise to this and produce work of a suitable standard. It appeared that there was an increase in the number of candidates for whom English is not their first language. This poses particular problems for both candidates and centres and does have implications for the delivery and assessment of Graded Units.

There were also, as in previous years, examples of centres which applied a standard below that expected in a Graded Unit. It is not always easy to determine how the standards set at SCQF Levels 7 and 8 actually apply to specific Graded Units. It is reasonable to expect therefore that there may be cases where developing the relevant expertise takes a little time. The underlying lesson is one that has been emphasised at training and development events for the HN Business Graded Unit. It is that marks should be awarded only when they can be justified – for example, when a point is supported by a valid reason or other suitable justification.

Verification confirmed that good practice with respect to Graded Units continues to develop. Centres are becoming more familiar with the requirements of them and are responding accordingly. As a result, the Graded Units are able to meet the purpose for which they were introduced. They seem to be able to integrate the various parts of the HNC/D Business and, very significantly, seem to be making a significant contribution to enhancing the credibility of the awards.

In order to meeting the requirements of central verification centres have to work to demanding deadlines, particularly if work is to be assessed and internally verified in time. Most centres adopt systems of double marking plus commenting on scripts which adds to the time involved in completing assessment procedures. These assist the verification process but also add to the pressure on centres. It is to the great credit of centres

that most were able to meet the time scales. All those involved at centres deserve much praise for the work and effort which they have put in to the HN Business Graded Unit.

Advice on good practice and areas for further development:

Good practice

As noted earlier, there is substantial evidence of good practice in centres. Some of it is the result of centres adopting ideas which have been suggested at training events and networking meetings. It is apparent from the work verified that centres are developing sound procedures for Graded Units. Good practice which applies to all three Graded Units (examinations and the project) included:

- Cross marking of candidate work
- Individual marking sheets for each candidate – these often contained space for comments where markers could indicate the reasons why marks had (or had not) been awarded. Sheets like this help to make comparisons between the reasons for awarding marks and can help to highlight differences of interpretation and of judgment. The most effective comments contained specific detail on the reasoning behind the marking and often referred directly to the marking guidelines to indicate why marks had been given. These sheets also provide a way of recording how differences between markers have been resolved.
- Rigorous application of the centre’s internal verification systems – these included notes on meetings etc. and provided another way of indicating how differences between markers had been resolved.

All the above help centres to apply a consistent standard to the assessment of candidate work. This is particularly important when, as is often the case, several members of staff are involved.

Some centres also provided notes on the procedures which had been adopted. These are very helpful in the verification process and do help to clarify the decisions centres have taken and the reasons for them.

Other examples of good practice applied more specifically to the different types of Graded Unit. As a result each of the two types will be taken in turn.

Graded Units 1 and 3 (Examination)

Good practice here relates to the marking of scripts are marked and how the marks are recorded. It includes:

- Using different coloured pens to distinguish between the first and second marker.
- Clearly indicating on candidate scripts where marks had been awarded e.g. the number of ticks matched the number of marks given; similarly total marks were noted on the sheet for each question or part of a question [both these make the verification process easier – verification is about ensuring that appropriate assessment judgements have been made and this is difficult to do if is not clear from scripts where marks have been awarded].
- Use of marking conventions – where these are used it can help markers to indicate why a mark has been awarded. This, in turn, can help markers when making assessment judgements. The notations used vary between centres. This is perfectly acceptable but, if they are used, it does help the verification process if an explanatory note is included. One possible form of notation could involve a mark for an example, shown as ✓1E; a mark for development of a point being shown as ✓1D; and a mark awarded for identifying a concept as ✓1C. This can also help in double marking and internal verification as markers/verifiers are able to see some rationale behind the marking.
- Using an exam booklet – almost all centres now adopt this approach. There is little doubt that it helps to demonstrate to candidates the importance of the Graded Unit examination.

- Making notes on the marking guidelines to indicate the approach adopted to marking – this is a particularly effective way to formalise the way in which discrepancies between markers have been resolved. This helps to promote consistency in marking across a cohort but it also helps to develop consistency over time. Relatively few centres did this but it is something which could usefully be adopted by others, especially where several markers are involved and/or where different markers may be used for different cohorts.

Graded Unit 2 (Investigation)

Again good practice here related to procedures adopted for recording marks. It included:

- Marking sheets for each of the three stages of the Investigation which were completed for each candidate – these can show clearly where marks were awarded and also be used to indicate how the additional marks in the marking scheme have been allocated.
- Comments on why marks had been awarded – these were often incorporated into the marking sheets. They are invaluable in external (and internal) verification as they show the reasoning behind the award of marks. They can play a vital part in the standardisation process.

In addition, it was very apparent from the investigation that the planning stage is critical. Candidates who had developed a clear, structured brief for their investigation generally coped well with the remaining stages.

Further development

There are two aspects of this. The first is about adopting good practice. The comments in the previous section may suggest possible actions that centres could take. There is no doubt that centres which exhibited good practice found it easier to apply appropriate standards. This applies to all three Graded Units.

The second aspect is about avoiding pitfalls which may lead to inappropriate standards being applied. These vary between the examination Units (Graded Unit 1 and Graded Unit 3) and the project Unit (Graded Unit 2). The following comments take each of the two types in turn and highlight some of the points which arise at verification. In conjunction with the good practice listed above, they could provide further guidance to centres on how to develop the Graded Units in the HN Business.

Examination Units (Graded Unit 1 and 3)

There is a clear distinction in standard between the two examination Units. Graded Unit 1 is at SCQF Level 7 while Graded Unit 3 is at SCQF Level 8. The difference in standard is partly addressed by the more complex case study at level 8 and by the level of course material associated with the Graded Unit. However, the rise in level also requires a higher standard of answer than Graded Unit 1. In particular, candidates need to address ‘command’ words in questions such as ‘Assess’ and ‘Evaluate’ and try to avoid producing descriptive answers.

In general the marking issues which arise at this verification event were similar to those from previous verification events. While most centres do apply appropriate marking standards there are a minority who are still coming to terms with marking at SCQF Levels 7 and 8. There are still examples of lenient marking. The main reasons for this are listed below. As already noted, all have been raised before and centres may wish to compare their own marking practice with them as a guide to what standards are expected. They apply in general terms to both Graded Unit 1 and Graded Unit 3.

- Candidates can only be awarded marks answering the question asked – even points which are sensible cannot gain marks unless they are relevant to the question. A common example of this was where marks were awarded for accurate explanations of theoretical concepts even though the candidate had made no attempt to relate them to the question and they did not seem to be relevant to it.

- In most cases a limited number of marks is available for relevant theoretical ideas but there were examples where a lot of marks were given for such statements. For both Graded Units, there are cases where the marking guidelines indicate that marks can be awarded for theoretical ideas but generally the number of marks available in these cases is small.
- Marks were often given for statements which were vague or imprecise – marks can only be given where it is clear that the candidate is making a valid point. There are an increasing number of candidates whose first language is not English. It is a significant achievement to be able to attempt a Graded Unit in what is effectively a foreign language. However, marks can only be awarded on the basis of what the candidate actually says and not on what they might have said.
- Marks cannot be given twice for the same point – it can be difficult to spot repetition especially in long answers which may ramble a little but it markers should be alert to it. Repetition also covers the case where a candidate makes comments which amount to the exact opposite of a previously credited statement
- Marks were given when a point was stated but no further explanation was given - candidates should offer some explanation in order to gain a mark. Again, this is not always easy to apply in practice but it is critical to marking at SCQF levels 7 and 8 and helps to distinguish work at these levels from Levels 5 and 6. This is related to the importance of analysis and evaluation at SCQF Levels 7 and 8.
- Marks should be awarded in accordance with the marking guidelines – this is particularly so where the guidelines place a cap on the total marks which can be awarded in particular circumstances.
- Development marks can only be awarded when there is a clear development of a point and it is apparent that the candidate understands what s/he is saying. Development marks can include examples but merely stating an example may not be sufficient. It should be clear that the candidate is aware of why the example illustrates the point being made.

Investigation Unit (Graded Unit 2)

It is easier to mark the work of candidates who follow the format suggested in the Graded Unit exemplar. Most centres do encourage candidates to do this and this undoubtedly helps candidates to achieve a pass grade or better.

There are two main points which centres may wish to consider:

- The investigation is at SCQF Level 8 and marking should reflect this. Again, there were examples of lenient marking. The reasons for this were similar to those noted above for the examination Graded Units. Centres which applied suitable standards to the examination Units were generally able to do the same for the investigation.
- Marking should be awarded following the guidance in the exemplar and the Unit specification – this is particularly so with respect to the minimum requirements. Candidates must meet the minimum requirements for the planning stage before they can progress to the remainder of their investigation. However, in order to pass they must also meet the minimum requirements for the other two stages. This can mean that candidates achieve 50% or better but do not meet the conditions required for a pass.

Overall, however, the Graded Unit for HN Business seems to be working well. There is no doubt that progress is being made. Centres in general have developed ways to ensure that candidates are aware of the standard expected of them and candidates are proving that they can meet the standards. There are a small minority of centres who are experiencing difficulties with assessment for the Graded Units. However, the evidence is that centres can overcome them. It is especially encouraging that where this has happened centres have been prepared to work hard to improve. The commitment of staff at centres and the effort and time which they have put into the Graded Units is immensely praiseworthy.