



Higher National Qualifications

And

Scottish Vocational Qualifications

Senior Verifier Report

2007

Subject: Management Skills

The purpose of this report is to provide feedback to centres on verification which has taken place within Higher National and Scottish Vocational Qualifications in this subject.

HIGHER NATIONAL UNITS

FEEDBACK TO CENTRES

General comments:

There were only a small number of visits in this verification group during this session. The Units verified fell into 3 main groups:

- Units which are part of the revised framework for HNC/D in Business, primarily DE3D 34 Managing People and Organisations
- Units which form part of the revised frameworks for HNC Management and Diploma in Management – these are new Units being verified for the first time
- Units which are part of other awards – many of these Units are in the old format and have been or are being replaced.

The relatively small number of visits means that any general comments should be treated with some caution. However, all visits showed that centres continue to deliver Units in the moderation group well. The use of exemplar assessment packs, where they are available, is now widespread. There are sometimes difficulties in interpretation of marking guidelines, particularly with some of the more complex Units in HNC/Diploma in Management, but there is no doubt that they are beneficial and contribute to a consistent standard across centres. All centres now have well-established procedures for delivering and assessing HN Units and the evidence is that, in most cases, these continue to work well. Overall, verification suggests that assessment judgements also continue to be made appropriately.

Support material has been made available by SQA for the HNC Management. This has been very well received by centres and is rightly perceived to be of high quality. It should greatly assist the delivery of the new Units in the HNC Management. It supports the verification process also, as it provides further guidance to the content needed for the successful achievement of a Unit and to the standards which students are expected to meet in their work for a Unit.

The difficulties with the assessment of DE3D 34 Managing People and Organisations were again apparent. The Unit specification requires closed book assessment and this is available in the exemplar assessment pack. However, experience has shown that the marking guidelines are open to a number of interpretations. Most centres have managed to find ways to ensure that the assessment conditions are satisfied and that suitable standards are applied to candidate work. Nevertheless, there remains some confusion and at some centres it has proved difficult to establish a common approach among those delivering the Unit. Fortunately, this situation has been addressed and a revised Unit specification, together with a new exemplar assessment pack, have been produced.

This clarifies the closed book assessment through the introduction of a cut-off score which should help to remove the problems that have arisen. The Unit will, from 2007-2008, move into a different verification group with other Units in the HN Business framework

Advice on good practice and areas for further development:

It was encouraging that the good practice which has been apparent in previous years continues to be evident during verification visits. The main aspects of it are described below. It is encouraging that all the points are ones which have been made in previous reports. This suggests good practice is becoming embedded in the system. Good practice includes:

- Well structured delivery systems- most centres maintain a master folder for each Unit
- Feedback to candidates on performance – this is often given on a specifically prepared front sheet which accompanies each assignment. Some centres also give additional script comments. Both are time consuming but good to see. Most assessors give more detailed feedback to candidates requiring re-assessment which, in many cases, gives careful suggestions on how the work can be raised to the requisite standard.
- Sound and conscientious assessment judgements – all the evidence from verification is that these continue to be made carefully and in accordance with the requirements of the Unit specification. The increasing number of Units at SCQF Levels 8 and 9 mean that demands on students and staff are also increasing. It would seem that all are rising to the challenge.

Once again, verification has highlighted the commitment of centre staff and the conscientious approach to delivery and assessment. This too is part of good practice.

Further Development

Although verification is not directly concerned with delivery, it is worth noting that many centres now make use of electronic methods of delivery and many have developed, or are developing, a VLE (virtual learning environment). This can have great benefits to students in terms of the resources available for learning especially since many of the Units in this Verification Group are studied by part-time students. The new support material for the HNC Management fits in well with this trend. The move to greater use of electronic methods is not without its dangers and at least one case of plagiarism arose in verification visits. One aspect of future development, therefore, is for centres to be alert to this and to have systems in place which can be used to deal with it when it occurs.

Generally, however, further development consists of developing and enhancing good practice. Two particular examples of this were mentioned in the report for session 2005-2006 and both warrant repetition. This may help to emphasise that good practice involves continuous improvement. The two examples are:

1. Expanding the marking guidelines in exemplar assessment packs – it was noted earlier that in some cases centres are finding that the interpretation of the marking guidelines can sometimes be problematical. In part this is due to the level of the Units which makes it difficult to provide marking guidelines which are fully comprehensive and cover every situation. At this level also candidates may provide responses which have not previously been envisaged – but which are quite legitimate. One way to tackle this is for a centre to decide on how it will interpret the marking guidelines and add notes to the guidelines for future reference. These notes can show what is (or is not) acceptable as a response. As well as keeping a record of how an issue was resolved, this helps to provide a consistent approach to marking between different assessors and over time.
2. Making more use of feedback to show candidates exactly why responses were satisfactory – as noted earlier many centres do give feedback but it tends to be more detailed when candidates require re-assessment. Candidates who do produce work of an acceptable standard also benefit from knowing exactly why their work has reached the standard required. This can help them to replicate this in subsequent assignments and may also be of value if they progress to other awards or to other higher education institutions. It can be particularly helpful to candidates as they move to a higher level and are unsure as to what additional demands this higher level places on them.

These two points are related. A clear decision on how to interpret marking guidelines helps centres to make specific comments on student work to explain why (or why not) it is satisfactory. It also helps to make assessment more transparent by clarifying for students exactly what is required of them. The internal verification process has a role to play here also. Verification this year suggests that there is a danger in some cases (often due to time restraints) that the IV process becomes an exercise in confirmation rather than a true quality assurance mechanism.

Internal verification is an excellent vehicle for resolving issues of interpretation. Notes of standardisation meetings tend to be brief and sometimes internal verification is delayed so any impact that it may have can be diluted.

Some centres suggested at verification that they would prefer to develop their own assessments rather than use assessment exemplar packs. This is a very suitable thing to do and can help to tailor assessment to particular circumstances. However, centres which do this are encouraged to seek prior verification for new assessment instruments and the associated marking guidance. Doing this helps to make the external verification process much more straightforward for all concerned.

It is very encouraging that the new Units for the HNC and Diploma in Management are being delivered well and that appropriate assessment judgements are being made. It is a tribute to the professionalism of staff at centres.