



Higher National and Vocational Qualifications Internal Assessment Report 2016 Horticulture

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 graded units

There were four graded units verified in session 2015–16. Three graded units were verified at central verification while one was the subject of a verification visit.

The graded units verified were as follows:

H7L2 34 HNC Garden Design
H7LO 34 HNC Horticulture
H7L1 34 HNC Landscape Management
F2D4 35 HND Horticulture and Plantsmanship

General comments

The HNC graded units were all examination based and were centrally verified. The HND unit is a project-based assignment and was subject to visiting verification.

Unit specifications, instruments of assessment and exemplification materials

The instrument of assessment for all HNC units was a 3 hour closed-book exam which is in accordance with the unit specifications. Candidates choose four from six questions as required. Each question integrates the knowledge from at least two units of the programme. Marking schemes and sample answers were provided for all questions and scripts were marked in accordance with these.

Evidence requirements

All exam questions were well designed, met with the unit specification and provided the correct level of challenge for the candidates. All were marked in accordance with the marking schemes and all grades were agreed. While a small number of very minor errors in marking were noted, none of these made a difference to the overall grades awarded to candidates.

At larger centres the use of the same question in different awards is good practice but the centres should take care that when the same question is used in different awards that the markers standardise answers. In a few cases the level of detail accepted by the different markers was notable.

In the project-based graded unit the candidate briefs were often very wide.

Administration of assessments

Where common questions were used in different awards at different campuses of the same centre the exams were held at the same day/time to ensure validity of the questions.

The record keeping for all graded units was good and assessments were carried out in accordance with the unit specification.

General feedback

All examination scripts presented were of a high standard and indicated the overall competence of the teams in delivery and assessment at Higher National level.

All examination scripts were double-marked and the final mark agreed between the two markers.

Centres would find it worthwhile to carry out analysis of the questions chosen by each candidate and the marks awarded as some questions had been answered by all candidates, while others had been chosen by only a few. Similarly, in some questions all candidates had achieved high marks while in other questions marks were more evenly spread.

In the project-based units the projects produced indicated the ability of the candidates to research a subject of their choice, but the title of the subject being researched could be more exact and defined.

Areas of good practice

All but one of the examinations had been subject to prior verification and all had been double-marked by the centre staff. It is recommended that all examination papers are prior verified and double-marked.

Specific areas for improvement

Where the same questions are used in different awards centres should standardise the marking schemes used. While all questions had been marked in accordance with the marking schemes the level of detail accepted by markers marking the same question in different awards was variable and centres are recommended to standardise answers to the same question delivered and marked by other staff.

Markers should avoid the use of a percentage pass on individual questions which may cause confusion to the candidates at feedback.

SVQ awards

General comments

In line with the LANTRA assessment strategy all centres delivering SVQs in horticulture were visited last session. There were a total of 13 visits carried out for SVQs in Horticulture during session 2015–16. The visits covered the following awards:

G9HV 21 SVQ Level 1 Horticulture
GH79 22 SVQ Level 2 Horticulture
GH7A 22 SVQ Level 2 Landscaping
GH7C 23 SVQ Level 3 Landscaping
GH7D 22 SVQ Level 2 Parks, Gardens and Green Space
GH7E 23 SVQ Level 3 Parks, Gardens and Green Space

The centres visited included local authorities, colleges and private training providers. All external verification visits were successful and none resulted in a hold on certification.

The SVQ awards continue to provide students with an appropriate vocational qualification for work in the land-based sector.

Unit specifications

All centres were using the most up to date specifications in the form of the LANTRA National Occupational Standards (NOS). LANTRA has provided additional assessment guidance for use when assessing the SVQs. This document provides clarification on the specifications, eg unit H53N 04 knowledge evidence states you must identify plants while the guidance document expands on that information and states ‘identify at least 20 plants/crops/grasses using their common and botanical names’.

Not all centres were using the assessment guidance. The external verifiers supplied the document to those centres that did not have it.

Evidence requirements

Centres generally met the evidence requirements for each unit and award verified. Knowledge evidence was most commonly evidenced by a series of questions and answers closely linked to the knowledge evidence requirements listed in the NOS, although some were naturally occurring during performance evidence. Most performance evidence was by observation although personal statements and witness testimonies were also used.

Centres that dealt with candidates with additional support needs may wish to consider more use of voice files rather than scribing answers to questions.

Administration of assessments

The record keeping at all centres was good and assessments were carried out in accordance with the unit specification.

General feedback

Observation of live assessment was carried out on a number of visits and in all cases the verifier agreed with the assessor's judgement and commented that the overall standard of work was high.

In more than a few centres the mechanism for recording performance evidence was insufficient, often lacking the detail required such as the details of the practical activity. Centres are reminded that there is a set of standard evidence recording sheets available which can be adapted to centre requirements.

On all occasions where candidates were interviewed they were very pleased with their programme and spoke very highly of the staff involved, particularly in relation to their specialist subject knowledge.

Centres that had candidates with additional support requirements were, in all cases, very supportive of their candidates' needs with programmes often being individually designed around a candidate's specific requirements.

While most assessors undertake a range of appropriate CPD, including attending industry conferences such as BALI and LANTRA etc, a number of assessors, particularly but not exclusively at smaller or remote centres, should ensure that they engage with others to ensure industry practice is kept up to date.

All centres had a policy and procedure for the internal verification of awards.

As always the weather does have an effect on the delivery of these awards and the majority of visits took place in May or June to ensure evidence was available.

Most centres made use of photographic evidence to complement other forms of evidence such as personal statements or observation checklists.

Areas of good practice

Good practice was observed in many of the centres visited which can be grouped under the following main headings.

Working environment

Most centres used a wide and varied range of areas to complete practical activities — from local authority parks to public gardens, community woodlands, gardens of historic houses, large private estates and local sports areas. In almost all centres live plant material was used for identification rather than photographs.

Standardisation

Centres with small numbers of candidates have used different approaches to ensure standardisation. For example, standardisation of units that are common to other awards offered by the centre (and assessed by other staff) helps support the sole assessor in horticulture in the judgement of assessment evidence.

Industry links

Most assessors include details in the CPD log of how they keep up to date with industry practice, including attendance at conferences organised by BALI, Trellis or LANTRA. Many assessors are also involved in other horticultural events such as Gardening Scotland and Scotland in Bloom. It is recommended that networking continues with other centres and providers as well as with other organisations such as the Institute of Horticulture.

Candidate portfolios

There were a number of examples of good practice found within the candidates' portfolios including:

- ◆ Use of a flowchart within the induction pack, which shows what happens as candidates submit evidence. The flowchart is comprehensive, simple and easy to follow.
- ◆ The SAFE START booklet issued to level 1 candidates, which allows them to increase their knowledge of health and safety issues as they progress on the course.

Recording of evidence

This session saw the first serious use of an e-portfolio (in the form of eAssessor) used to record assessment evidence.

Candidate support

All candidates interviewed spoke of the high level of support provided by the centre. This is noted particularly at Level 1 and for those candidates with additional support needs. Many centres get the learners involved in the assessment of their own needs and encourage them to take ownership of their development needs.

Specific areas for improvement

Some common recommendations that were identified at a number of centres include:

Terminology

The use of pass/fail or cutting scores is still in use at some centres. While these may be used internally, eg to feedback to employers, they should not be used on the assessment evidence.

Evidence recording

In more than a few cases the information required to be completed on the observation performance evidence was incomplete. Observation Recording Paperwork must accurately record the practical 'you must be able to do' tasks. These Observation Records must include (at the very minimum): assessor name, candidate name, date the observation took place, the location where the task took place, and a brief outline of the task itself.

Centres should consider space for more free text in the candidate's performance evidence, particularly when the evidence is a personal statement.

While scribed materials are annotated in the majority of centres, in a few centres care should be taken to ensure any scribed evidence is clearly identified as such.

Steps must be taken to ensure authenticity when candidates produce typed-up evidence, eg plant identification documentation for 'Establish Crops or Plants evidence requirement C'.

Cross-referencing

While cross-referencing of the NOS to the evidence requirements is generally carried out well, there are still some centres that do not use a cross-referencing system. Introduction of this will make the assessor's job easier as it makes it less likely that evidence requirements will be omitted.

Standardisation

Within some small teams standardisation is often informal and not recorded. These teams may wish to consider a standardisation log where these informal discussions relating to standardisation are recorded.

Centres should avoid mixing assessment materials from other awards, eg NC units unless it is clearly referenced to the NOS.