



Internal Assessment Report 2010: BAC Science (458)

The purpose of this report is to provide feedback to centres on verification in National Qualifications in this subject.

National Qualifications (NQ) Units

Titles/levels of NQ Units verified

F785: Science: Interdisciplinary Project (SCQF level 7)

General comments

In this first session of the qualification, 35 centres submitted projects for 125 candidates. The assessment decisions of 27 centres were accepted and there were issues identified with eight centres, most of which involved recommendations for re-grading. This shows a clear and accurate understanding of the requirements of the national standards, which was greatly enhanced by the support event which SQA ran in February, attended by all delivering centres.

The SQA website has dedicated pages for the Baccalaureates which contain the Unit specifications and Assessment Support Packs, including project templates and exemplar projects. Centres used these materials extensively and commented on their usefulness. In addition, all delivering centres attended a support event in February 2010 which involved an in-depth study of the assessment requirements, the Unit specifications, the project templates and the exemplars. Feedback from centres indicated that they had a good understanding of the Unit requirements and the national standards as a result of the activities carried out at the event.

All centres used the SQA templates for each stage of the project, which gave clear instructions on the Evidence Requirements. There were also opportunities during support events and visits to centres by the Baccalaureate Development Manager to discuss and clarify requirements.

In a small number of cases, elements such as timescales or the presentation template were omitted, although referred to in other parts of the documentation. In these cases feedback was given to centres through the EV report. In most cases rich assessor comments greatly facilitated the assessment and verification process, and guidance to this effect was given to the small number of centres where assessors' comments were less detailed. It was also recommended that assessors include comments at the end of each stage of the project. A small number of centres were reminded that all sections of the templates should be completed.

All centres used SQA templates and assessed in accordance with the evidence criteria provided by SQA for each stage of the project. Feedback was also sought from external partners or contacts with whom the candidates had worked.

The internal verification process was found to be robust in almost all centres, but in a small number of cases it was recommended that the process be strengthened or that it be more clearly documented. EVs were also able to draw

on information provided by the centre representatives during the Quality Forum event.

There was a range of internal verification models, which included groups of centres holding a central event led by the local authority, a team of staff (sometimes interdisciplinary) within a centre, neighbouring schools working together, and science and languages staff carrying out mutual internal verification.

In some cases internal verifiers' comments were included on final assessment sheets, which was very informative during the central verification process. Centres were reminded to include both assessors' and internal verifiers' signatures along with the date on all projects.

Many centres were commended on their approach to internal quality assurance, which helped to ensure that the appropriate level had been attained by the candidates and that assessment decisions were in accordance with the assessment criteria.

Areas of good practice

College/school and university/school partnerships were formed to deliver the Interdisciplinary Project, which provided excellent opportunities for the candidates. To facilitate this, partnership agreements were drawn up which agreed the roles and responsibilities of the partners. Candidates made external links with universities, colleges, companies and organisations, which greatly enhanced their learning and helped to develop the generic skills. In a number of authorities the Quality Improvement Officer took an active role in supporting centres and co-ordinating a group approach to delivery, assessment and quality assurance.

At the introductory stages of the project, one centre produced a booklet for parents and pupils to provide clarity on the new qualification. In many centres meetings between teachers/tutors and candidates were timetabled on a weekly basis, which was extremely beneficial. Seminars were offered on project management, research skills, evaluation skills and planning. Some centres organised a cross-curricular panel to hear and approve candidate proposals. Others formed a cross-curricular steering group or team to support Baccalaureate candidates. One centre enrolled candidates for an Open University (OU) course, which provided access to OU resources of benefit to the Interdisciplinary Project.

The interim review was used effectively to assess candidates' progress and highlight possible additional support required.

A range of innovative methods were chosen by candidates to present their findings, which were often presented to a wide audience which sometimes included external contacts, pupils in other year groups and also staff not directly involved with the IP. In many cases feedback was sought from the audience and

taken into consideration at the assessment stage of the project. Some centres organised a presentation event or an event to showcase projects.

Generally candidates developed independence and autonomy of working, which will benefit them in the transition to higher education or employment. Centres were commended for their support for candidates and guidance throughout the project.

Areas for improvement

A number of development areas were identified as follows:

- ◆ The internal verification processes were found to be robust in most centres, but in some cases it was recommended that these be strengthened.
- ◆ Centres are reminded that timescales must be included in the plan, which is one of the minimum criteria.
- ◆ It was recommended to some centres that stronger interdisciplinary connections are made at the proposal and planning stages of the project. Some centres asked candidates to write a short clarification below the broad context tick boxes, which was informative for the assessor and also maintained a focus for the candidates. Although not mandatory, this was identified as good practice.
- ◆ Where necessary, centres should request candidates to resubmit proposals and plans to ensure they meet the minimum criteria for a pass. However, proposals and plans should not be graded at the start of the project, as grading is holistic and the planning process continues throughout the project.
- ◆ Centres are reminded to submit evidence for all five stages of the project and to include assessors' comments on the documentation for all five stages.
- ◆ At the proposal stage of the project, candidates should also include details of how their skills are to be developed.
- ◆ Projects should not bear a close resemblance to the exemplar in the Assessment Support Pack. Centres are also advised against over-directing candidates and should ensure that candidates choose and develop their project themes independently.
- ◆ Nuffield Projects should not be submitted as Interdisciplinary Projects. Themes from Nuffield Projects, if of interest to the candidates, may be developed further to meet the criteria of the IP, and some of the research findings may be included, if relevant.
- ◆ In some cases, centres were advised to strengthen external links, to work with other schools to share good practice, and to involve more staff in the school to support the Baccalaureate. It was also recommended that the excellent collaborative work in some local authority networks be continued and adopted in other local authorities.
- ◆ Centres should provide additional support to candidates with reflective writing and contingency planning.