



Internal Assessment Report 2010: Accounting and Finance (266)

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

Higher National Units

General comments

The Units which have been reviewed during this session have been in place for some time. The frameworks for HNC/D Accounting have been under review and new frameworks will be in place from the 2010–11 session. The frameworks for HNC/D Business and HNC/D Administration and Information Technology, which are closely linked, have also been under review and will be available at the same time.

Many of the Units reviewed by the team fall within the current frameworks for these qualifications, although there are others which are in other frameworks. Most centres have a clear grasp of what the Units reviewed by the team require, with one or two exceptions which are being addressed separately.

For some of the smaller centres, there continues to be difficulty in having sufficient numbers of appropriately qualified staff to deliver and quality control programmes. This is an area which may be addressed by attendance at network meetings, where relationships can be formed to assist with any difficulties. However, the standard and level of material reviewed by the team has been fairly consistent, demonstrating once again that most centres have a clear understanding of the requirements of the national standards.

There have been a number of requests to the Qualifications Manager for clarification for one Unit in particular: *Record Keeping for Small Businesses*. This Unit has been under some scrutiny, with the issues addressed by the team. A revised Unit will be available from August 2010.

Several Units have been subject to revision as part of the HN framework review, which has taken account of feedback from stakeholders.

The revised framework for HN Accounting was launched at an event in April 2010 and was well received. It is currently unclear how many centres will adopt the new frameworks. The aim is to have assessment exemplars available for all of the mandatory Units for the HNC by August 2010 and by the following year for the HND mandatory Units.

Again, there has been little visiting verification for HN Units during this session, as we have reached the end of the three-year rolling programme. However, the new framework will herald the start of the new cycle in August 2010. During this year the EV group has held one meeting to standardise our approach to visiting, and one to review the feedback from the network event to discuss the new error tolerances in the new Units. A guidance document on implementing the new error tolerances is available on the website.

We continue in our approach to ensure that both financial and cost/management accounting areas are reviewed during our visits. It is often the case that different

staff teams deliver on these areas, and by reviewing both areas we are able to gain an overall view across all centres of the delivery of these two main areas.

There has been limited uptake for the Professional Development Awards for Accounting as yet, but in the current economic climate this may be a way that centres can offer additional products which can be easily integrated into existing delivery programmes. The awards cover financial accounting Units in one product and management/cost accounting in another, which means that candidates who work in a specific job role have an opportunity to gain a recognised award which relates to their work experience without having to complete the full HNC qualification.

It is also useful for centre staff to bear these in mind when candidates do not complete the whole HNC but may have completed the appropriate Units to achieve a PDA. This enables more positive PI data to be presented, whilst boosting candidates' confidence.

Again, during this year we have found few areas which have caused centres concern. This is to be expected, as the current framework has been in place for a number of years. We hope that this will also be the case when the revised Units are introduced at the beginning of the next academic session.

Assessors are, on the whole, familiar with Unit specifications.

Many of the current assessment exemplars have been in circulation for around five years, and Assessors in centres are familiar with the requirements. It should be reiterated at this stage that any assessment instruments devised locally within centres should be submitted for prior verification.

Assessors and Internal Verifiers will have to familiarise themselves with the new Unit specifications, and more importantly with the guidance on making assessment decisions using the new error tolerance method.

It is recommended that all centres ensure that any assessment exemplars are subjected to internal verification before being used.

There appears to be a clear understanding of the Evidence Requirements for the Units in the UK-based centres.

Most of the centres that are delivering this framework use SQA assessment exemplars. This means that the levelling has been addressed for them, and the administration is covered in the Assessor guidelines.

Where assessment instruments have been devised in a centre and submitted for prior verification, the levelling is reviewed at this point. From the visiting verification which has taken place this year, it appears that IV procedures have been adhered to. Again, it is stressed that IV should take place before an assessment instrument is used in a centre, to ensure that it is appropriate.

On the whole the feedback to candidates has improved over the years. Assessors are providing feedback either on scripts backed up by verbal feedback or using the feedback sheets which are included in the exemplars. When reviewed during candidate discussions, the general picture is that candidates are given feedback within two weeks of assessment events. Candidates find this useful either for addressing areas of weakness or building on a strong understanding for further assessment or progression.

There were few EV visits during this session, and it was not always possible to speak to candidates in person; sometimes interviews were held by telephone. Where candidates were interviewed, the feedback was very positive. Tutors have been supportive, offered planned assessment events, and given ample feedback on performance soon after an event.

Candidates appear to receive teaching schedules which detail the timing of assessment events. However, all who were interviewed noted that this was open to review, depending on the candidate group.

Whilst there are assessment instruments for all of the mandatory Units and many of the optional Units taken in centres, there are frequently no re-assessment instruments. Many centres have a policy of requiring Assessors to prepare re-assessment instruments.

Where locally-devised assessment instruments are used, it is highly recommended that these be submitted for prior verification.

Areas of good practice

The areas of good practice noted during this year's reviews have been mentioned in detail in previous reports. However, it is worth noting a few of them:

- ◆ Detailed teaching schedules issued to candidates at the commencement of Units to allow them to see when assessment events will take place.
- ◆ Detailed written feedback provided to candidates to allow them to improve on areas of weakness.
- ◆ Contextualised assessment instruments.

Areas for improvement

Submitting assessment instruments for prior verification is one area where improvement can be made in a number of centres.

Higher National Graded Units

Titles/levels of HN Graded Units verified

DE64 34: HN Accounting Graded Unit 1

DE65 35: HN Accounting Graded Unit 2

DE66 35: HN Accounting Graded Unit 3

General comments

These Units have been in operation for a number of years, and Assessors in centres have a good grasp of the requirements. Following feedback from centres on Graded Unit 1 (GU1), the Unit specification was changed. This seems to have had the desired effect of widening the spread of grades for candidates entered for the Unit, whilst providing a more accurate test of candidates' competence.

Graded Unit 2 (GU2) has been the most difficult for centres because of the time it takes to assess candidates. Most centres now deliver this Unit from the beginning of the HND year to allow candidates sufficient time to complete it before the Graded Unit 3 examination preparations begin. The standards are well understood by most centres, many of whom have developed their own more detailed marking guidelines.

There has been no central verification for Graded Units 1 and 3 during this academic session, and only postal verification of Graded Unit 2. This is likely to take place for the next academic session, when the new frameworks will be in place and the next three-year rolling cycle begins.

In many cases the instruments of assessment have been amended to contextualise the case study for the individual centre to reflect the local economy.

The standards are well understood by most centres, many of whom have developed their own more detailed marking guidelines. The evidence requirements of Graded Unit 2 are now well understood by Assessors in centres.

Most of the centres who are delivering this framework use SQA assessment exemplars. In doing so, the levelling has been addressed for them and the administration is covered in the Assessor guidelines. Some assessment instruments have been devised in-centre and submitted for prior verification; the levelling is reviewed at this point.

Again, it is stressed that IV should take place before an assessment instrument is used in a centre, to ensure that it is appropriate.

Feedback to students for Graded Units 1 and 3 is generally based on marks allocated for each task.

Graded Unit 2 requires significantly more detailed feedback, as it is an ongoing report which evolves via three separate stages, over a period of time. This differs

in layout, since many centres have developed their own marking guidelines which dictate the feedback provided. On the whole, the feedback for Graded Units has been appropriate and timely.

Access to assessment is generally based on candidates continuing their studies until the end of the academic session, since GU1 and GU3 generally take place at the end of each of the HNC and HND years respectively.

Areas of good practice

Some centres have prepared more detailed marking schedules for the GU2 assessment. This provides more detail relating to marks awarded or not awarded.

One centre formalises GU2 by appointing candidates as consultants by letter, setting out deadlines for the submission.

Other centres have amended the case study scenario to be appropriate to the local industry.

SVQ Awards

Titles/levels of SVQ Awards verified

SVQ Accounting level 2

SVQ Accounting level 3

General comments

2009–10 session saw the final opportunity for candidates to be registered to take either SVQ Accounting level 2 or 3. The SVQ at level 2 finishes on 31 July 2012, and the level 3 on 31 July 2014. As a result, no new candidates can be registered after 31 July 2010.

Many centres have not been running this framework for a number of years, having decided to offer another awarding body's accounting qualification instead.

The centres which are running this framework have been assessing these standards since 2003, and, on the whole, the Assessors have a very clear and accurate understanding of the requirements of the 2003 standards.

The instruments of assessment for the three devolved assessments are fairly new, since the previous joint arrangement with the Association of Accounting Technicians (AAT) has meant that their instruments of assessment had been used in the past. These took the form of formal examinations at set times of the year.

The advantage of using the SQA instruments of assessment is that assessment can take place on demand when the candidate is ready, rather than having to wait until the two AAT exam diets per year in June and December.

All centres have been using these SQA-devised assessment instruments for two academic sessions now, and there has been positive feedback from Assessors and candidates alike.

The evidence which has to be provided for the successful completion of the SVQ in Accounting, at either or both levels, has become increasingly difficult for candidates to gather as naturally occurring in the workplace. This is largely due to most businesses operating computerised accounting packages and having staff specialise in one small area of accounting, rather than allowing them a broader view. Those operating in small businesses generally have a better opportunity to gather the breadth of evidence required. As a result, Assessors have had to simulate situations for candidates to gather evidence.

The main Assessor in one of our centres has developed material over a period of time which she uses extensively to assist candidates in succeeding in their studies. The IV procedures at the centre are extremely robust and her candidates have benefitted from the provision of SQA assessment instruments.

The feedback to candidates reviewed during this session has been detailed, useful and timely.

All candidates interviewed gave positive feedback regarding the support provided by Assessors and centres. All were visited in the workplace on a regular basis and found the Assessors to be supportive in their guidance for gathering evidence towards their goal of completion.

All candidates commented on the benefit of being able to complete the devolved assessment at a time when they felt ready, rather than having to strictly adhere to exam timetables.

The funding available for candidates has been a recurring issue which is likely to continue in the current economic climate.

Areas of good practice

Most centres utilise detailed assessment schedules which are agreed and followed up on by Assessors and candidates.

Regular visits by Assessors in one centre in the northern part of the country were significantly hampered by the extreme bad weather early in the year. The candidates commented during discussions that contact was maintained via telephone and e-mail during these three months. Some delay in receiving feedback on assessment decisions was inevitable, but was kept to a minimum thanks to the hard work of the Assessor.