**Evidence to support the validation of the revised**

**HNC/HND ADMINISTRATION & INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY**

**1. Rationale for the revision of the qualification**

The HNC/D Administration and Information Technology Group Awards are designed to equip candidates with the knowledge and skills required for success in current and future employment or for progression to further academic and/or professional qualifications. The last review of these qualifications took place in between 2008 and 2009 with validation in early 2010.

The general aims of the Group Awards are to:

1. Develop candidates’ knowledge and skills such as planning, implementing, analysing and evaluation.
2. Develop vocational skills related to the National Occupational Standards or other professional body requirements and so enhance candidates’ employment prospects.
3. Enable progression with the SCQF.
4. Develop study and research skills.
5. Develop transferable skills, including Core Skills, to the levels demanded by employers and/or progression in higher education.
6. Provide academic stimulus and challenge, and foster an enjoyment of the subject.

Since 2010 there has been a rapid growth in information and communications technology. Anecdotal feedback from centres suggested that technological aspects of the Group Awards were becoming, or already, outdated. So to ensure that the qualifications will continue to meet the demands of the sector, a scoping exercise was undertaken to obtain more quantitative and qualitative information about specific areas requiring refresh; and also information from employers regarding the knowledge and skills they require of administrators in relation to information technology. The scoping also took into account feedback suggesting over-assessment continues to be a problem within some of the Units. The results of this, together with feedback received via Qualification Support Team meetings, the Annual Qualification Survey and Network Events has led to amendments to the following Unit specifications:

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| **Unit title and code** | **Action** |
| Office Technologies F7J9 34 (HNC/HND) | Replaced by new Unit |
| IT in Business: Spreadsheets F84V 34 (HNC/HND) | Major revision |
| Recording Financial Transactions F847 33 (HNC/HND) | Major revision |
| IT in Business: Word Processing and Presentation Applications F84C 34 (HNC/HND) | Major revision |
| Presentation Skills F84E 35 (HND) | Major revision |
| IT in Business: Advanced WP F84A 35 (HND) | Minor revision |
| Information and Communication Technology in Business F84W 35 (HND) | Minor revision |
| IT in Business: Advanced Spreadsheets F849 35 (HND) | Minor revision (no code change) |
| IT in Business: Advanced Databases F848 35 (HND) | Minor amendment (no code change) |
| Administration and IT Graded Unit 1 (F8KW 34) | Updated in line with unit changes |
| Administration and IT Graded Unit 2 (F8KX 35) | Updated in line with unit changes |
| Administration and IT Graded Unit 3 (F8KY 35) | Updated in line with unit changes |
| **No change**  |
| IT in Business: Databases F84X 34  |
| Communication: Business Communication HT7K 34 |
| Office Administration F7JA 34 |
| Personal Development Planning\* DE3R 34 |
| Office Management F84D 35 |
| Developing the Individual Within a Team F870 34 |
| Developing the Individual Within a Team F86Y 35 |

\* A contextualised Assessment Support Pack to be produced

**Assessment issues**

Despite reducing assessment volume as part of the 2008/9 review, over-assessment continues to be an issue raised by centres in relation to some Units. *IT in Business: Spreadsheets* is the most frequently criticised Unit in this regard, with feedback suggesting the SQA devised Assessment Support Packs (ASPs) are cumbersome and can lead to excessive use of remediation and reassessment.

To address this issue a number of steps have been taken. Duplication of generic content has been removed across the Group Award, for example, the requirement to assess the planning and organisation in *IT in Business: Word Processing and Presentation Applications* as this is a generic skill which is also covered in *IT in Business: Databases* and *Personal Development Planning*. In addition to this, duplication has been reduced within Units, e.g. the requirement to carry out an evaluation of tasks within each Outcome of *Presentation Skills* and *IT in Business: Spreadsheets* has now been amended to a holistic evaluation of the entire assessment as part of Outcome 3. Similar examples exist within other revised Units. Consideration was also given to removing content relating to legislation which appears across multiple Units, however when examined it was agreed that duplication of specific legislation was minimal and was in fact appropriate in the context of Units that may be delivered on a stand-alone basis.

In order to reduce assessment, each Unit was subject to scrutiny in terms of Evidence Requirements that specify specific quantities of evidence and repetition of the same task more than once. The consideration here was whether quantities could be reduced (e.g. *Provide examples of new templates and macros for* ***two*** *business documents,* rather than ***four*** business documents) and retain validity. This was considered because excessive quantities of evidence and repetition of tasks, leads to convoluted, contrived and cumbersome assessment, which becomes more artificial, removed from reality and in some cases therefore less valid; particularly when its corollary is excessive reassessment.

To address this many of the requirements to repeat tasks were removed to allow a more authentic and realistic approach to assessment, although some quantities were retained as they help to define the standard (e.g. *Create a main document from information provided that contains address fields and* ***two or more*** *other fields from the data source*). This more flexible authentic model should help facilitate more realistic assessment allowing learners to demonstrate their problem solving skills through applying their knowledge to a scenario, rather than the atomised approach taken with some Units, such as *IT in Business: Spreadsheets,* where assessment tends to consist of a very defined set of discrete step-by-step tasks which learners complete according to instructions provided, rather than identifying and customising solutions to the problem themselves.

It became apparent during this process that one of the key reasons the previous review had not managed to completely eliminate problems with excessive assessment was related to concerns about teaching to assessment. Where there are concerns about teaching to assessment, Unit writers are inclined to include all content they would wish to see taught within the Evidence Requirements. Although this may be done with the best of intentions it inevitably leads to excessive assessment volumes. The QRT therefore had to accept that the purpose of the Unit specification is to set the standard for assessment; it is not a course syllabus, nor a tool to police the potential for any undesirable teaching practices within centres. Where qualifications are internally assessed, the risk of teaching to assessment will always be present, however the “forcing” centres to teach all relevant content by including it all in Evidence Requirements is incompatible with the need to reduce assessment. To achieve the principle aim of reducing assessment, only content deemed essential for assessment was included in Evidence Requirements. Guidance relating to content of teaching and assessment was expanded, particularly for the Units *Digital Technologies for Administrators* and *IT in Business: Spreadsheets* where the most significant changes were made. In terms of teaching to assessment, SQA has no tangible evidence at the current time that this is a widespread practice in centres.

**Graded Units**

There was no mandate to review Graded Units arising from the consultation, therefore changes to Graded Units were purely to accommodate the relevant changes to constituent Units.

The impact on Graded Unit specifications is minor as the requirements for designing the assessment tasks remain the same – i.e. the same level of demand and the same proportion of marks allocated across the same Unit content. However, further detail has been added to the instructions for designing assessment tasks in the interests of clarity. None of this represents a change from the content of existing Graded Unit assessments. The additional detail will enhance the standardisation and reliability of future Graded Unit assessments by providing more guidance, both for writers of assessments and those making assessment judgements.

There is a more significant impact on assessment of Graded Unit 1 as most of the existing *Office Technologies* content is now be obsolete. Six marks are allocated to questions derived from *Office Technologies/Digital Technologies for Administrators* within Graded Unit 1 Paper 1, and further questions may be sampled from it in Paper 2. As a result, any existing Graded Unit 1 assessments will no longer be valid for the revised Graded Unit 1.

The impact on Graded Units 2 and 3 is significantly less, as most of the changes relate to streamlining assessment, with a small amount of content removed. Much of the generic planning and organising content has been streamlined, therefore while removed from certain Units, is still included within the Group Award and therefore remains available for sample within the Graded Unit assessments. Existing Graded Unit 2 and 3 assessments should be checked to ascertain whether they contain any content that has been removed from the constituent Units and therefore is no longer valid for inclusion.

**Summary of Changes**

**HH82 34: Digital Technologies for Administrators (previously Office Technologies) – Complete revision**

Office Technologies was the only unit requiring a complete revision. With the rapid growth in information and communications technology it had become obsolete and required rewriting to meet the needs of current and future administrative requirements as per the following specific aims of the qualifications:

* Develop technical and administrative knowledge relevant to current administrative practice
* Develop the knowledge underpinning the technical expertise developed throughout the course
* Prepare for appropriate employment

In Outcome 1, the focus has been switched from LANs and WANs to mobile devices, remote networking and the use of technology to work remotely. Elsewhere in the unit, File management and Boolean search techniques have been removed and instead emphasis has been placed on the importance and application of collaborative software, social media and web services in today’s working environment. As a result of these changes a new Unit title has been adopted which more accurately reflects the new content - *Digital Technologies for Administrators*.

**HH83 34: IT in Business: Spreadsheets – Significant changes to Evidence Requirements**

Feedback regarding this Unit consistently suggested that assessment is cumbersome and the volume involved too onerous. Consequently, changes were focused on reducing and making assessment more flexible. The aim of the Unit is to equip learners to be able to create spreadsheets to meet the needs of business organisations, whether this is to resolve a problem or support existing or new processes. This requires problem solving skills and an ability to have a holistic understanding of how individual functions and tasks are combined to create solutions, as well as knowledge of the discrete functions and tasks themselves. Assessment is currently too atomistic and directed, taking away much of the creative, holistic and problem solving aspects.

All Outcomes have been updated. In Outcome 1 the notable change is the introduction of a wide range of functions as possibilities for assessment, rather than the existing mandatory two. The sequence of Outcomes 2 and 3 have been swapped with the evaluation of chart data consolidated for the entire Unit within Outcome 3. This will enable learners to evaluate their work in the context of the entire problem/scenario, rather than being focused on individual data sets and/or charts.

**HH84 34: IT in Business: Word Processing and Presentation Applications – Significant changes to Evidence Requirements**

This Unit is designed to develop skills and knowledge in word processing and presentation packages to aid business communication. The Unit has been amended but still comprises most of the content of the previous version. The most significant change is the removal of the requirement to assess the planning and organising of the task and the evaluation of progress against milestones. This was one of the areas identified as being generic and covered elsewhere in the Group Awards. In terms of a stand-alone Unit, it has no unique intrinsic relationship to Word Processing and Presentation software.

Prescriptive quantities for generating evidence have been removed in some cases, to allow more flexible, less contrived assessment. In other cases, the quantities specified have been reduced. For example, in Outcome 3, rather than evaluating the impact of ***three*** pieces of UK legislation, learners are required to explain the impact of UK legislation on five key areas, selecting the most suitable for a particular scenario. This allows assessment to be more meaningful, rather than reproducing rote learned knowledge.

In Outcome 4, a statement has been added to explicitly state that the Evidence Requirements are not tied to any specific presentation software application and that terminology may be interpreted in the context of varying software packages accordingly.

**HH81 33: Recording Financial Transactions – Significant changes to Evidence Requirements**

This Unit is designed to enable candidates to develop book-keeping skills in order to complete trial balances, VAT returns and now bank reconciliations. It is primarily intended for candidates with a requirement for book-keeping as a skill within an administrative role or for those considering a career in book-keeping or finance or whose career progression may otherwise benefit. Feedback indicated that there was too much accounting theory for administrators and that posting to books of original entry is outdated.

As a result, Outcome 1, involving transferring data from original documents to books of entry has been removed and replaced with processing transactions and extracting a trial balance which was previously Outcome 2. The revised Outcome 2 involves completing a VAT return (which was previously Outcome 3), and new content involving a bank reconciliation has been introduced for Outcome 3. Within these changes, quantitative aspects have been reduced e.g. the number of cash book transactions in Outcome 1 (previously Outcome 2) reduced from 11 transactions to 7.

The inclusion of accounting software was considered but rejected on the basis that it would not develop learners’ knowledge of book-keeping and accounting principles, as it is possible to complete many accounting tasks using software with limited knowledge of the underlying theory. Learners completing this Unit should find adapting to accounting software fairly straightforward and in employment terms will actually have more to offer an employer in comparison to a learner who has completed only an accounting software Unit. Inclusion of software as an individual Outcome was also considered but was felt to be of limited value for the same reason and also that the possibilities would be very limited if restricted to a single Outcome.

**HH85 35: Presentation Skills – Significant changes to content of Outcome 1 and Evidence Requirements throughout**

This Unit is designed to develop the skills required for the advanced use of presentation software; including a range of multi-media; and to apply these skills to deliver effective presentations. Feedback suggested that Outcome 1 was extremely onerous and that specific detail, such as “Master slides” should be excluded to allow for a wider choice of presentation software to be used if desired.

As a result of this feedback Outcome 1 has been completely revised. Rather than having to explain various factors for three different scenarios covering six different presentation methods, Evidence Requirements are now focused on learners selecting one method appropriate to the scenario presented, with a rationale provided for the presentation method selected. This will demonstrate knowledge of other possibilities without leading to excessive volumes of assessment evidence. Outcome 1 is now much more focused on preparation for the presentation and how learners will manage the event, including coping strategies for stress, audience management etc.

Regarding the feedback about specific terminology – use of some form of terminology to establish an assessment standard is unavoidable (e.g. X number of ‘slides’), therefore as with *IT in Business: Word Processing and Presentation Applications* (XXXX 34) a statement has been added to Evidence Requirements indicating that interpretation of terminology in the context of a variety of software packages that relate to the same knowledge and skills is acceptable.

**HH87 35: Information and Communication Technology in Business – minor changes**

This Unit is designed to develop candidates’ knowledge and skills in identifying, evaluating, managing and presenting business information to facilitate and influence decision-making.

The scope of Outcome 2 has been narrowed to focus on the security of data communication rather than entire systems, which have tended to focus on LANs and WANs, and are considered quite dated in technological terms. This is the only significant change to the Unit.

**HH86 35: IT in Business: Advanced Word Processing – minor changes**

This Unit is designed to allow candidates to develop and apply advanced word processing skills to assist in the production of business related documents. Candidates are required to solve problems and make decisions relevant to a working environment. Overall the changes are minor. Outcome 1 remains unchanged, master and sub documents have been removed from Outcome 2, and document management features removed from Outcome 4. Throughout Outcomes 2, 3 and 4, repetition of evidence has been reduced (e.g. *insert an illustration* – previously ‘insert three illustrations’).

**F849 35: IT in Business: Advanced Spreadsheets – very minor amendments**

This Unit is designed to develop in-depth technical skills to facilitate a high level of competence in the component functions of a spreadsheet programme. This Unit should develop critical and evaluative thinking skills.

A few changes were made to Outcome 2 to clarify Evidence Requirements. In Outcome 3 the number of statistical and financial functions required for the assessment was reduced from three to two, and the analysis of the business problem/process now applies to all Outcomes holistically rather than requiring this to be done for each Outcome.

These changes are not significant enough to warrant a change of code for the Unit.

**F848 35: IT in Business: Advanced Databases – very minor amendment**

This Unit is designed to allow candidates to develop an understanding of database design and the use of advanced features to provide information that is specific or summarised to enhance decision-making.

The only change to this Unit was to Outcome 2, to broaden the Knowledge, Skills and Evidence Requirements to include other ways of importing image data than hyperlinks.

**DE3R 34: Personal Development Planning (Assessment Support Pack only)**

This Unit provides a framework for candidates to take responsibility for their own learning and development. It provides a framework for the development of the personal and general skills and qualities which employers seek in the workplace and which are increasingly recognised as underpinning success in personal life, in citizenship and in lifelong learning. This Unit falls outwith the HN Administration and IT verification group and is a servicing Unit across many other HNC/D Group Awards, therefore there was no possibility of making changes to the Unit specification.

The QRT agreed that much of the feedback suggesting learners do not see the Unit’s relevance and/or value may stem from delivery and assessment rather than the Unit specification itself. It was therefore recommended that a new ASP be produced which would be contextualised in order to enhance learners’ experience and understanding of its relevance to the administration function.

**2. Details of those involved in the revision**

The Qualification Development Team met 3 times during the period from April - September 2016. During these meetings roles and Units were assigned and Unit changes/amendments were discussed and agreed. Tony Hamilton, Qualifications Officer, organised and led these meetings and provided direction throughout. The team consisted of the following members:

Kathryn Lyneborg Team Leader and Qualification Development Specialist for Office Technologies and Personal Development Planning

Marian Forgan Qualification Development Specialist for Recording Financial Transactions and Personal Development Planning

Wendy McEwan Qualification Development Specialist for ITIB Spreadsheets, ITIB Advanced Spreadsheets and ITIB Advanced Databases

Ellie Sneddon Qualification Development Specialist for Presentation Skills, ITIB Word Processing & Presentation Applications and ITIB Advanced Word Processing

Janet Strain Qualification Development Specialist for ITIB Word Processing & Presentation Applications and ITIB Advanced Word Processing

In addition Unit specialists were sought for advice on *Information and Communication Technology in Business* for the amendments this Unit required and for the development of the online assessment for *Digital Technologies for Administrators*.