Higher National Unit specification

General information for centres

Unit title: Organisational Ethics

Unit code: F8K9 38

Unit purpose: This Unit is designed to enable candidates to critically analyse ethical dilemmas which organisations have to deal with. The Unit also enables candidates to evaluate organisational responses to resolving these dilemmas.

On completion of this Unit the candidate should be able to:

1   Critically analyse ethical dilemmas in an organisation.
2   Evaluate responses to ethical dilemmas in an organisation.

Credit points and level: 2 HN credits at SCQF level 11: (16 SCQF credit points at SCQF level 11*)

*SCQF credit points are used to allocate credit to qualifications in the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF). Each qualification in the Framework is allocated a number of SCQF credit points at an SCQF level. There are 12 SCQF levels, ranging from Access 1 to Doctorates.

Recommended prior knowledge and skills: Candidates should normally be experienced managers with a detailed knowledge and understanding of contemporary organisation processes and procedures. They should be fully aware of how these apply to organisations with which they are familiar and of the challenges which these organisations face. Candidates should also possess well-developed research, communication and analytical skills and be able to demonstrate prior achievement at SCQF level 10 or equivalent.

Core Skills: There are opportunities in this Unit to develop all components of the Core Skills of *Communication* and *Problem Solving* at SCQF level 6. There is no automatic certification of Core Skills or Core Skills components.

Context for delivery: If this Unit is delivered as part of a Group Award, it is recommended that it should be taught and assessed within the subject area of the Group Award to which it contributes.

The Unit is one of two Units which make up the *Professional Development Award in Organisational Ethics and Decision Making* at SCQF level 11. It is recommended that it should be taught and assessed within this Group Award.

Assessment: This Unit can be assessed holistically by means of a report based on the candidate's own experience in an organisation. Candidates can be given a brief for the report which should be presented in a recognised format.

Higher National Unit specification: statement of standards

Unit title: Organisational Ethics

Unit code: F8K9 38

The sections of the Unit stating the Outcomes, Knowledge and/or Skills, and Evidence Requirements are mandatory.

Outcome 1

Critically analyse ethical dilemmas in an organisation

Knowledge and/or Skills

♦ Theories, principles and concepts of ethics
♦ Ethical dilemmas
♦ Research on ethical practices
♦ Socio-political and cultural factors

Outcome 2

Evaluate responses to ethical dilemmas in an organisation

Knowledge and/or Skills

♦ Models of ethical practice in organisations
♦ Organisational culture, values and belief systems
♦ Efficiency, effectiveness, economy and equity

EVIDENCE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE UNIT

Candidates must provide evidence which covers all knowledge and skills items from both Outcomes to show that they can critically analyse ethical dilemmas and evaluate responses to these dilemmas. The ethical dilemmas must be ones which have a significant effect on organisational activity within a specified organisation.

In carrying out the critical analysis, candidates must show that they can:

♦ select and critically engage with relevant and valid theories, principles and concepts of ethics and apply these in a meaningful way
♦ identify and conceptualise the main aspects of ethical dilemmas and indicate inter-connections between these different aspects
♦ provide a rationale to justify their choice of theories, principles and concepts of ethics
♦ critically take into account relevant current socio-political and cultural factors which may have an impact on ethical dilemmas
♦ draw conclusions from the critical analysis which are directly linked to the components of the analysis outlined in the preceding four bullet points

Higher National Unit specification: statement of standards (cont)

Unit title: Organisational Ethics

Candidates must also demonstrate that they can evaluate responses to ethical dilemmas faced by managers in organisations. In undertaking this evaluation, candidates must show that they can:

♦ suggest and justify responses to ethical dilemmas which take into account the conclusions from their critical analysis and models of ethical practice in organisations
♦ assess the effect that organisational culture, values and belief systems could have on the responses to ethical dilemmas
♦ make a reasoned judgement on the efficiency, effectiveness, economy and equity of the responses to ethical dilemmas
♦ support their evaluation with valid references to research on ethical practices

Candidates must also show some originality and creativity in the way in which they carry out their critical analysis or evaluation

ASSESSMENT GUIDELINES FOR THE UNIT

For this Unit, candidates could be asked to submit a theory informed report on ethical dilemmas within an organisation. The organisation on which the report is based should be one known to the candidate and may well be the organisation where the candidate is employed.

The report should adopt a critical perspective and be presented in a suitable format and referenced using a recognised system. It is likely to be in the region of 3,500 words excluding sections such as summary, appendices and bibliography. The report could be supplemented by oral questions and/or combined with a presentation by the candidate to ensure all aspects of the Evidence Requirements are fully met.

Assessment for this Unit can be undertaken independently or combined with *Organisational Decision Making* (SCQF level 11).

Administrative Information

Unit code: F8K9 38

Unit title: Organisational Ethics

Superclass category: AF

Original date of publication: August 2009

Version: 01

History of changes:

Version	Description of change	Date

Source: SQA

Higher National Unit specification: support notes

Unit title: Organisational Ethics

This part of the Unit specification is offered as guidance. The support notes are not mandatory.

While the exact time allocated to this Unit is at the discretion of the centre, the notional design length is 80 hours.

Guidance on the content and context for this Unit

This Unit is intended for individuals who are in a position to influence the strategic direction of an organisation or a significant part of an organisation. Candidates will probably, therefore, be in a senior management position or have realistic expectations of taking up such a post in the very near future. Candidates should be managers who are seeking to enhance and develop their skills at a level commensurate with their position within the organisation.

The Unit is one of two Units which make up the *Professional Development Award in Organisational Ethics and Decision Making* at SCQF level 11. The other is Organisational Decision Making. The focus of this Unit is analysing ethical dilemmas and evaluating organisational responses to them. The Organisational Decision Making Unit concentrates on the analysis of decision making and proposing ways by which decision making can be enhanced. In many respects the two are closely related. One example may be that in order to make a suitable strategic decision a manager may have to take steps to resolve an ethical dilemma. This type of situation arises, for instance, when information about products or services provided by the organisation indicates that they may be (or already have been) harmful to users. Another example may be situations where organisational procedures have come under public scrutiny and their ethical basis is being questioned. Managers may have to consider factors such as what action would be appropriate, what ethical standards the organisation should meet, likely customer or client reaction to any decision and so on.

Both Units emphasise critical analysis and evaluation However, they are both applied Units in that candidates are expected to make use of their own experience as managers while undertaking the analysis and evaluation. Both Units, therefore, involve the synthesis of theoretical ideas with specific organisational contexts. In addition, candidates will be expected to reflect on how the analysis and evaluation can guide and inform their work as managers.

Candidates undertaking this Unit will be expected to work autonomously and to undertake a detailed and analytical investigation into current thinking and research within the field of study. Candidates will be expected to adopt a critical approach to current thinking and research.

Organisational ethics is a complex area which is subject to changing circumstances and can be unpredictable. At this level, the emphasis is about the material which candidates use to help them carry out a critical analysis of ethical dilemmas and evaluate possible responses to them.

For Outcome 1, candidates will be expected to be aware of different types of ethical dilemmas ie personal, professional and moral. They will also be expected to have a good grasp of the theories, principles and concepts of ethics. This understanding can best be thought of as a bank of ideas on which candidates can engage with as required to enable them to analyse and evaluate. They will also need to be aware of current research in ethics particularly that which directly impinges on the kind of issues they face and the types of organisations within which they work. Again, candidates will be expected to select from available research and choose the work which contributes most effectively to their own analysis and evaluation.

Higher National Unit specification: support notes (cont)

Unit title: Organisational Ethics

Publications such as the, *Harvard Business Review* and *MIT Sloan Management Review* often contain articles which highlight current ethical issues faced by managers and organisations and can provide a starting point for candidates. More specialist journals such as *Journal of Business Ethics* may also be a useful source for candidates wishing to review current research. Ethical dilemmas often make newsworthy items and news based magazines such as *The Economist, The Internationalist,* may contain useful information also. There are often dedicated internet sites linked to particular ethical dilemmas and, while the information from them should be treated with care, they may help to inform the work that candidates do.

It may be necessary to be flexible in determining what counts as current research. As a general rule current can be taken to mean articles published within the last 5 years or so but the exact period may well depend on factors such as the issue involved, the scope and depth of the research and so on. It is possible, for example, that ethical dilemmas which are critical to a particular candidate may not feature prominently in very recent research. The relationships corporate responsibility, ethics and sustainability may, for example, have more resonance for private sector organisations than for some publicly funded organisations. In cases like this, candidates may have to make use of use of older publications.

Outcome 2 is about evaluation. Candidates are expected to apply the principles and concepts from the first Outcome to inform their evaluation, including using current research. They are expected also to take into account factors outwith their own organisation such as codes of practice in other organisations and the impact that responses may have on the wider organisational environment. It is possible, for example, that an organisation may face public criticism for its response to a particular dilemma. For this Outcome also candidates should recognise that the context of ethical dilemmas can change and that what may be an acceptable response at the present time may no longer be considered appropriate in the future.

Guidance on the delivery and assessment of this Unit

This Unit is part of the *Professional Development Award in Organisational Ethics and Decision Making* at SCQF level 11 and is likely, therefore, to be delivered as part of this award.

Delivery and assessment of this Unit should take account of the fact that it covers areas which can be difficult and challenging for candidates, who may be forced to confront fundamental attitudes and beliefs. The subject matter is politically and socially sensitive as well as susceptible to change which, at times, can be rapid. Candidates will need to be aware that the consequences of actions may be far-reaching and not always readily predictable.

The Unit is intended to help candidates develop a robust approach to the analysis and evaluation of ethical dilemmas of the type that they will meet as managers in modern organisations. This approach should reflect the candidate's own background and experience as well as prevailing organisational and societal norms. Overall, therefore, delivery should encourage candidates to develop their own approach to the management of ethical dilemmas.

Higher National Unit specification: support notes (cont)

Unit title: Organisational Ethics

At SCQF level 11, candidates will also be expected to take significant responsibility for their own learning. Delivery of this Unit will, as a result, probably consist of providing guidance and support to candidates to enable them to organise their own learning experience. Candidates can be expected to have some background in the theories, concepts and principles of ethics but are likely to benefit from guidance on suitable texts, journal articles and other references. Some candidates may also be aware of some current research in ethical dilemmas faced by managers, particularly in operational activities with which a candidate is familiar.

The delivery process may be able to introduce candidates to a wider range of contemporary research and help candidates to draw comparisons and contrasts between their own organisational situation and what happens in other organisational contexts. In order to gather information about their own and other organisations, candidates will have to undertake some investigation and may also carry out some research. Candidates who have limited experience of this kind of investigative work may benefit from some introductory work on methods of investigation and basic research skills.

Candidates can be encouraged to share experiences and to discuss relevant theoretical ideas and current research. In the early stages of the Unit, for example, discussion seminars may be useful. Candidates can take it in turn to give an opening presentation to the seminar, for example. As the Unit, progresses the emphasis of these seminars can shift towards the specific investigation which candidates are undertaking. Candidates may find it beneficial to share their findings and initial conclusions with others. Again, this can be structured around a presentation by a candidate on the work s/he is doing within their chosen organisation.

Another way of helping candidates develop a broader approach is to make use of case studies. Candidates can be given short case studies or examples of problems involving ethical dilemmas and asked to work out the process of proposing possible actions in response to such dilemmas. They can then critically evaluate these responses through group discussion and self reflection.

The Unit is very closely linked to the other Unit in the Group Award, *Organisational Decision Making* at SCQF level 11. Any approach to decision making, for example, must be built on a sound ethical foundation. The two may be delivered together. If this approach is adopted, candidates can be encouraged to draw connections between the two Units. This combined approach has benefits in terms of the most efficient use of delivery resources.

Assessment for this Unit requires that candidates carry out research on ethical dilemmas faced by managers in an organisation. The organisation should be one known to the candidate. This is likely to be the one with which the candidate is currently employed but this does not have to be the case. Some candidates for example may be relatively new to their current organisation but have retained good contacts with ones where they have worked previously. On the other hand, candidates who are new to an organisation may bring fresh insight and may welcome the opportunity to work on issues which may lead to positive developments in their new environment. Candidates who work for large diverse organisations may prefer to focus their research on one aspect of the organisation's activities. Candidates who have recently been transferred within such an organisation may wish to carry out their research in the area from which they have come. Other candidates may be closely connected with voluntary organisations and feel there is greater scope for a meaningful research project within their voluntary work.

Higher National Unit specification: support notes (cont)

Unit title: Organisational Ethics

As already noted, some candidates may benefit from help and guidance on how to gather relevant and suitable information for the investigation which they have to undertake. Candidates could be given guidance, for example, on setting clear boundaries on the type of information they require, the organisational sources which they consult and the methods they could use to gather information.

They should, however, recognise any bias in the information that they obtain and take account of this in any conclusions that they draw. Candidates must explore more than one type of ethical dilemma and they may find it helpful to adopt an approach to their research which enables them to compare and contrast two different types of ethical dilemma. Candidates may benefit from guidance on what types of ethical dilemma to consider and making sure that the dilemmas they choose are significant from the point of view of managers in the organisation. The significance of particular ethical dilemmas is likely to vary substantially between different organisations. This means that the significance of an ethical dilemma can only be determined by the particular organisational context within which it arises.

Candidates must critically analyse the nature and causes of their chosen ethical dilemmas. In doing so they must take into account relevant theoretical ideas of ethics, research and relevant factors in the wider organisational and societal environments. The skill required of candidates is that of selecting suitable material from the wide range available. For example, they should choose those theories and/or concepts which in their view enable them to shed light on the ethical dilemmas in the most effective way. In order to choose wisely candidates will require a good command of relevant theoretical and other material.

Similarly, candidates should make a careful selection of theoretical and research material to support their evaluation of the responses to ethical dilemmas. It is not necessary for candidates to recommend specific responses that managers might make although their evaluation may make it clear that particular responses are likely to be more effective than others. In making these judgements candidates must refer to codes of practice in their own and other organisations.

In order to meet the requirements of SCQF level 11, candidates should show some originality and creativity in the way they carry out their critical analysis and evaluation. This is not always easy to judge but one way is to consider the extent to which a candidate moves away from familiar and established patterns of behaviour. Possible criteria which could be used as evidence of this include:

♦ choice of theories, concepts and principles (eg candidates make efforts to consider more specialised ideas which they have identified for themselves; candidates make original choices from material which they have been given; candidates apply theories in a different but valid manner)
♦ choice of information and evidence to support analysis and evaluation (eg candidates choose particularly apposite pieces of evidence from their chosen organisation; candidates consider more specialised published research; candidates apply research originally undertaken in a different context)
♦ sources used (eg candidates gather information to support their analysis from a wide range of organisational sources; candidates consult non-routine publications for research findings)
♦ research methodology (eg candidates use innovative methods to gain information to support their critical analysis)

Unit title: Organisational Ethics

Candidates could present their findings in a report. There is no specified format for this although candidates should adopt a recognised format — perhaps that used by the organisation for which they work. The report should include a bibliography and make used of a standard referencing system.

The length of the report can be determined by the candidate but it is likely that all the Evidence Requirements can be covered in about 3,500 words excluding appendices, summary and bibliography.

Assessment can be combined with *Organisational Decision Making* at SCQF level 11. Where a combined assessment is used for both Units, candidates will be expected to satisfy the Evidence Requirements of both Units holistically. A combined assessment will be longer and is likely to be in the region of 7,000 words excluding supporting appendices etc.

Opportunities for developing Core Skills

There are opportunities to develop the following Core Skills components in this Unit.

Communication: Written Communication **(Reading) at SCQF level 6**

Candidates will be expected to refer to theories, principles and concepts of ethics and to current research in this subject area. This will require them to read complex material containing sophisticated argument. They will be expected to evaluate this material and extract from it information suitable for their own situation. This will require them also to pull together and synthesise material from a range of different sources and perspectives.

Communication: Written Communication **(Writing) at SCQF level 6**

In order to complete the Unit, candidates will have to gather information and will be expected to present their findings in a suitable manner such as a report. For this, they are expected to adopt a recognised format. This report will analyse ethical dilemmas and evaluate possible responses to these dilemmas and will have to be structured and laid out in an appropriate manner. The nature of the subject matter is such that the report will include complex language and specialist vocabulary, especially as candidates are expected to refer to current research in ethics.

Communication: Written Communication **(Oral Communication) at SCQF level 6**

Candidates may be asked to give a presentation in connection with the work they have undertaken. If this is the case, they will be expected to convey essential information and ideas on ethical dilemmas to a number of other people. These ideas are complex and difficult by their very nature and require candidates to use appropriate language but to do so in a manner which is tailored to the needs of the audience. Candidates could make use of presentational software which would allow them to integrate formal language and other forms of transmitting information.

Problem Solving: **Critical Thinking at SCQF level 6**

Candidates are expected to critically analyse ethical dilemmas in an organisation. The variables involved will be complex and may be inter-related in unpredictable ways. Candidates will be expected to disentangle the various factors and assess their relative importance in the light of theoretical principles and current research. They are expected also to use their analysis to develop possible responses to the ethical dilemmas.

Higher National Unit specification: support notes (cont)

Unit title: Organisational Ethics

Problem Solving: **Planning and Organising at SCQF level 6**

In order to successfully carry out the work needed to complete the assessment for this Unit, candidates will have to develop a plan for their work, identify and obtain suitable resources and carry out the plan. At SCQF level 11, they will be expected to exercise substantial autonomy and initiative in carrying out this task.

Problem Solving: **Reviewing and Evaluating at SCQF level 6**

The Unit requires candidates to evaluate possible responses to ethical dilemmas. Part of this will require candidates to make some judgements on the effectiveness of the information that they have gathered. Their conclusions may, therefore, be conditional on the nature and success of the research they have undertaken and the information they have used. The process of reviewing and evaluation (ie analysing a problem solving strategy, gathering suitable evidence, drawing conclusions and making recommendations) also underpins both Outcomes in this Unit.

Open learning

This Unit is particularly suitable for Open Learning as candidates should be able to acquire the relevant knowledge by working through the distance learning material which will be available for this Unit. Appropriate arrangements would need to be made for assessment and quality assurance.

Disabled candidates and/or those with additional support needs

The additional support needs of individual candidates should be taken into account when planning learning experiences, selecting assessment instruments, or considering whether any reasonable adjustments may be required. Further advice can be found on our website
www.sqa.org.uk/assessmentarrangements

General information for candidates

Unit title: Organisational Ethics

This Unit forms part of the *Professional Development Award in Ethics and Organisational Decision Making* at SCFQ level 11. It has been designed to offer developmental opportunities for strategic managers.

The Unit is about ethical dilemmas of the type that you could face in a strategic management position. Acting in an ethical manner is a crucial part of the work of strategic managers. This Unit will help you to deal with ethical dilemmas which, by their very nature, can often be difficult. Ethical dilemmas and their resolution can also have further repercussions for the organisation as a whole and this exacerbates the difficulties in dealing with them. However, despite this, the successful resolution of ethical dilemmas is vital to any successful organisation — indeed the success of the organisation may depend directly on how well it resolves the various ethical dilemmas that it faces. Strategic managers play a pivotal role in ensuring that others and organisations as a whole behave in an ethical manner.

This Unit will enable you to recognise and critically analyse ethical dilemmas faced by managers in organisations. It will also enable you to evaluate possible responses to them, including the consequences of these responses. You will be expected to base your analysis and evaluation on relevant principles, theories and concepts of ethics and to take into account research in this field. Ethical dilemmas and their resolution do not occur in a vacuum and you will be expected also to be aware of external socio-cultural and other factors as well as how other organisations respond to them. You will, for example, have to consider codes of practice used by organisations.

You will be given support material to help you work on this Unit on your own. It will enable you to build on the knowledge and understanding you already have and help you review your own experience.

Assessment for this Unit requires you to produce a report on ethical dilemmas faced by managers in the organisation that you know of. This will involve you in critically analysing ethical dilemmas and evaluating possible responses to them. Successful completion of the assessment will enable you to achieve this Unit.