



## Higher National Project-based Graded Unit Specification

### General Information

This Graded Unit has been validated as part of the HNC Soft Tissue Therapy. Centres are required to develop a project-based assessment in accordance with this validated specification.

**Graded Unit title:** Soft Tissue Therapy: Graded Unit 1

**Graded Unit code:** H4XP 34

**Type of Project:** Investigation

**Publication date:** July 2019

**Source:** Scottish Qualifications Authority

**Version:** 03

### Graded Unit purpose

This Graded Unit is designed to provide evidence that the learner has achieved the following principal aims of the HNC in Soft Tissue Therapy:

- ◆ Develop critical and evaluative thinking and the ability to manage and absorb large amounts of information
- ◆ Develop self-directed and self-reflective learning skills
- ◆ Develop the ability to be flexible and work co-operatively within a team structure
- ◆ Develop core and transferable skills (study and research skills, personal effectiveness)
- ◆ Utilise knowledge, skills and understanding gained from the units delivered within the qualification to analyse and evaluate appropriate soft tissue management to current acceptable professional standards.

### Credit points and level

1 Higher National Unit credit at SCQF level 7: (8 SCQF credit points at SCQF level 7)

## Higher National Project-based Graded Unit Specification: General Information (cont)

**Graded Unit title:** Soft Tissue Therapy: Graded Unit 1

### Recommended entry to the Graded Unit

It is recommended that the learner should have completed,, or be in the process of completing the following Units relating to the above principal aims prior to undertaking this Graded Unit:

*Sports Therapy: Anatomy and Physiology*  
*Functional Anatomy*  
*Basic Subjective and Objective Assessment*  
*Clinical Sports Massage*  
*Sports Massage for Events and Special Populations*  
*Pathology and Aetiology of Sports Injury*  
*Prevention and Management of Sports Injury*  
*Sports Therapy: Professional Standards*  
*Clinical and Team Experience 1*

### Core Skills

Opportunities to develop aspects of Core Skills are highlighted in the Support Notes of this Graded Unit specification.

There is no automatic certification of Core Skills or Core Skill components in this Graded Unit.

### Assessment Support Pack

The Assessment Support Pack for this Unit provides assessment and marking guidelines that exemplify the national standard for achievement. It is a valid, reliable and practicable instrument of assessment. Centres wishing to develop their own assessments should refer to the Assessment Support Pack to ensure a comparable standard. Assessment Support Packs are available on SQA's secure website.

### Equality and inclusion

This Graded Unit has been designed to ensure that there are no unnecessary barriers to learning or assessment. The individual needs of learners should be taken into account when planning learning experiences, selecting assessment methods or considering alternative evidence.

Further advice can be found on SQA's website:  
**[www.sqa.org.uk/assessmentarrangements](http://www.sqa.org.uk/assessmentarrangements)**.

# Higher National Project-based Graded Unit Specification: Designing the project and assessing learners

**Graded Unit title:** Soft Tissue Therapy: Graded Unit 1

## Assessment

This Graded Unit will be assessed by the use of a project-based investigation developed by centres. The project should provide the learner with the opportunity to produce evidence that demonstrates she/he has met the aims of this Graded Unit.

The project undertaken by the learner must be a complex task which involves:

- ◆ variables which are complex or unfamiliar
- ◆ relationships which need to be clarified
- ◆ a context which may be unfamiliar to the learner

The project must require the learner to:

- ◆ analyse the task and decide on a course of action for undertaking the project
- ◆ plan and organise work and carry it through to completion
- ◆ reflect on what has been done and draw conclusions for the future
- ◆ produce evidence of meeting the aims which this Graded Unit has been designed to cover

## Suggested Brief

Soft Tissue Therapy is increasingly being used to help athletes optimise performance or recover from injury, however, the approach is young and dynamic and requires practitioners to develop significant breadth and depth of their knowledge base in order to ensure practice is both safe and effective. The Graded Unit project brief therefore allows the learner to plan, develop and evaluate a specific project to increase their understanding and skill which should impact favourably on their own safe and effective practice.

Examples could be:

- ◆ Rationale and evidence behind the use of a specific technique introduced in Clinical Sports Massage
- ◆ Effectiveness of pre-event massage on sporting performance
- ◆ Effectiveness of post-event massage on sporting performance
- ◆ Effectiveness of soft-tissue therapy on injury rehabilitation
- ◆ Effectiveness of specific thermal therapy techniques on performance recovery
- ◆ Incidence and/or prevalence of injuries in a sport with which the learner is not familiar (has never had any involvement)
- ◆ Rehabilitation approaches to significant/severe injuries

## Higher National Project-based Graded Unit Specification: Designing the project and assessing learners (cont)

### Graded Unit title: Soft Tissue Therapy: Graded Unit 1

- ◆ The debate over appropriate certification for soft tissue/sports therapy practitioners
- ◆ The requirement for professional associations and self-regulating bodies in soft tissue and sports therapy

This list is not exhaustive.

### Planning Stage Brief

Learners must produce a project outline. It should include:

- ◆ A general statement outlining the area of interest and how that interest has been developed.
- ◆ The key features and/or issues of the project and their inter-relationship.
- ◆ Identification of the aims (*maximum two*) and objectives (*minimum three*).
- ◆ A research approach should be chosen and justified, which allows effective achievement of the project. Learners should choose quantitative and/or qualitative research methods.
- ◆ Identification of a *minimum of four key secondary sources* to be used for data collection/information gathering. Secondary sources (academically respected texts, research papers, government papers, policies and procedures from professional bodies and such like) should be used to provide direction, underpin the themes and provide for critical reflection of the project. In addition, primary sources (questionnaires/interviews) may also be considered.
- ◆ An overview of the methodology of the project and an action plan (for all three stages) should be presented, which clearly identify when and how the aim(s) and objectives of the project will be achieved.
- ◆ The plan should indicate a clear focus on the task of collecting specific information on the selected topic and provide evidence of communication with the primary source(s) where primary data is being collected.
- ◆ Ethical issues involved in undertaking the project should be identified.
- ◆ Objective criteria on which to evaluate the research process should be identified.
- ◆ A viable contingency plan must be included.

The work produced should always be the learner's own, however, lecturers are expected to provide learners with advice, guidance and constructive criticism as necessary when they are devising their plans and this should be recorded as evidence for verification purposes.

# Higher National Project-based Graded Unit Specification: Designing the project and assessing learners (cont)

**Graded Unit title:** Soft Tissue Therapy: Graded Unit 1

## Development Stage Brief

Learners must provide clear evidence of undertaking the planned project and implementing the action plan. Evidence should be clearly referenced to the information sources (secondary with the option of primary).

Secondary sources may include any information from credible sources that would inform knowledge or practice in the profession, such as:

- ◆ generally accepted academic texts
- ◆ research papers
- ◆ government reports
- ◆ policies and procedures from professional bodies

This list is not exhaustive. All sources should be referenced appropriately using an appropriate academic system which is acceptable to the institution.

Evidence of primary sources may include:

- ◆ questionnaires (blank) and collated answers
- ◆ recordings or transcripts of interviews
- ◆ observation records
- ◆ other credible evidence to indicate differences between the beginning and end of an intervention

Once the evidence is gathered and collated, it must be prepared using appropriate language, format and structure and should present a sound conclusion consistent with the data collected. Appendices should be used for raw data/background information and referenced as appropriate.

The learner should have regular meetings with the lecturer/assessor who will provide advice and reasonable assistance where appropriate. Meetings should be recorded for verification purposes.

## Evaluation Stage Brief

Learners must produce a report that contains:

- ◆ A re-statement of the objective criteria on which to base the evaluation of the research process.
- ◆ Evaluation of whether the evidence gathered was the most appropriate evidence to meet the aims and objectives.
- ◆ Reference to any modifications to the approach during the course of the project or to alternative approaches considered.
- ◆ Conclusions as to how the process of carrying out the project (planning, implementation, and reporting) could be improved.
- ◆ Justified recommendations for personal development which are relevant to the project.

## Higher National Project-based Graded Unit Specification: Designing the project and assessing learners (cont)

**Graded Unit title:** Soft Tissue Therapy: Graded Unit 1

### Conditions of assessment

The learner should be given dates for completion of each stage of the project. However, the instructions for the project should be distributed to allow the learner sufficient time to assimilate the details and carry out the project. During the time between the distribution of the project instructions and the completion date, assessors may answer questions, provide clarification, guidance and reasonable assistance.

Reasonable assistance is the term used by SQA to describe the difference between providing learners with some direction to generate the required evidence for assessment and providing too much support, which would compromise the integrity of the assessment. Reasonable assistance is part of all learning and teaching processes. In relation to the assessment of Higher National Project-based Graded Units, assessors may provide advice, clarification, and guidance during the time between the distribution of the project instructions and the completion date, ie at each stage of the project.

Remediation allows an assessor to clarify learner responses, either by requiring an amendment or by oral questioning, where there is a minor shortfall or omission in evidence requirements. In either case, such instances must be formally noted by the assessor, either in writing or recording, and be made available to the internal and external verifier. In relation to Higher National Project-based Graded Units, learners must be given the opportunity for remediation at each stage of the project.

The evidence for a Higher National Project-based Graded Unit is generated over time and involves three distinct stages, each of which has to be achieved before the next is undertaken. This means that any re-assessment of stages must be undertaken before proceeding to the next stage. The overall grade is derived from the total number of marks *across all* sections, and should reflect the ability of the learner to work autonomously and the amount of support required. In relation to Higher National Project-based Graded Units, learners who have failed any stage of the project and have been unable to provide the necessary evidence through remediation must be given the opportunity for re-assessment of that stage.

At this level, learners should work independently. It is the responsibility of Centres to take reasonable steps to ensure that the project is the work of the learner. For example, Centres may wish to informally question learners at various stages on their Knowledge and Understanding of the project on which they have embarked. Centres should ensure that, where research is carried out in other establishments or under the supervision of others, the learner does not receive undue assistance.

## Higher National Project-based Graded Unit Specification: Designing the project and assessing learners (cont)

**Graded Unit title:** Soft Tissue Therapy: Graded Unit 1

### Evidence Requirements for this Graded Unit

The project undertaken by learners will consist of three stages: planning; developing; and evaluating. The following table specifies the minimum evidence required to pass each stage.

All stages should use language, format, and structure appropriate to SCQF level 7. Learners should use a wide range of routine skills and some advanced skills associated with the subject/discipline. For example:

- ◆ convey complex ideas in a well-structured and coherent form
- ◆ use a range of forms of communication effectively in both familiar and new contexts
- ◆ use standard applications to process and obtain a variety of information and data

The mark allocation for stage 1 (planning) reflects the importance of planning when developing a piece of research.

Project stage	Minimum Evidence Requirements	% Mark Allocation
Stage 1 — Planning	<p>Evidence that the learner has:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>◆ planned a specific investigation that accurately interprets the requirements of the brief</li><li>◆ identified key factors/issues influencing the project, and their inter-relationships</li><li>◆ stated appropriate aims (maximum two) and objectives (minimum three) objectives for the project</li><li>◆ developed and justified a research approach that is appropriate to the subject matter (eg qualitative/quantitative)</li><li>◆ identified a <i>minimum of four key sources</i> to be used for data collection/information gathering: secondary sources (academically respected texts, research papers, government papers, policies and procedures from professional bodies and such like) with the option of primary sources (questionnaires/interviews) should be used provide direction, underpin the themes and provide for critical reflection of the project.</li><li>◆ identified where the materials/resources/information required to complete the project can be sourced/accessed</li><li>◆ identified any ethical issues involved in undertaking the project</li></ul>	24

## Higher National Project-based Graded Unit Specification: Designing the project and assessing learners (cont)

**Graded Unit title:** Soft Tissue Therapy: Graded Unit 1

Project stage	Minimum Evidence Requirements	% Mark Allocation
Stage 1 – Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♦ identified criteria on which to evaluate the research process</li> <li>♦ developed an action plan to carry out the project, setting realistic timescales for the developing and evaluating stages.</li> <li>♦ identified available contingency plan.</li> </ul>	
	<i>The learner <b>must</b> achieve all of the minimum evidence specified above in order to pass the Planning stage.</i>	
Stage 2 — Developing	<p>Evidence that the learner has carried out the project, <b>meeting the requirements of the plan</b>, and managing the project which:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♦ developed a coherent line of thought</li> <li>♦ retained task focus based on identified aims and objectives</li> <li>♦ maintained accurate details of the project</li> <li>♦ accessed an appropriate range of sources of information, as per the action plan</li> <li>♦ applied effective research techniques</li> <li>♦ demonstrated effective selection and analysis of information. Information was appropriate for each objective</li> <li>♦ applied problem solving techniques and identified issues where this has been required</li> <li>♦ presented objective, valid and reliable results</li> <li>♦ presented sound conclusions which was consistent with data, and acknowledged sources</li> </ul>	64
	<i>The learner <b>must</b> achieve all of the minimum evidence specified above in order to pass the Developing stage.</i>	



## Higher National Project-based Graded Unit Specification: Designing the project and assessing learners (cont)

**Graded Unit title:** Soft Tissue Therapy: Graded Unit 1

Project stage	Minimum Evidence Requirements	% Mark Allocation
Stage 3 — Evaluating	<p>Evidence that the learner has evaluated the effectiveness of the approach taken, which includes all stages of the activity. The evaluation should include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ A re-statement of the objective criteria, as identified in the planning stage</li> <li>◆ Evaluation of whether the evidence gathered was the appropriate evidence to meet the aims and objectives.</li> <li>◆ Reference to any modifications to the approach during the course of the project or to alternative approaches considered</li> <li>◆ Conclusions of how the process of carrying out the project could be improved</li> <li>◆ Provides justified recommendations for personal development which is relevant to the project</li> </ul>	12
	<p><i>The learner <b>must</b> achieve all of the minimum evidence specified above in order to pass the Evaluating stage.</i></p>	

## Higher National Project-based Graded Unit Specification: Designing the project and assessing learners (cont)

**Graded Unit title:** Soft Tissue Therapy: Graded Unit 1

### Assessing and grading learners

The overall project will be marked out of **100**. Only whole marks should be used.

The percentage of marks allocated to each stage of the project is outlined in the **Evidence Requirements**.

It is a requirement that learners must meet the minimum *Evidence Requirements* for the *Planning* stage *before progressing to the Developing stage before progressing to the Evaluating* stage. Learners may produce evidence over and above that specified in the minimum *Evidence Requirements* and deserve more than half the available marks for that stage. Assessors should use the Grade Related Criteria outlined below to judge learner performance.

Learners are required to work independently to meet the *Evidence Requirements* of the Graded Unit. At the same time, learners need appropriate support. SQA uses the term reasonable assistance to describe the balance between supporting learners with their project and not providing too much assistance.

At the end of *each* stage there should be opportunities for remediation and re-assessment of learners for that particular stage. This includes the final *Evaluation* stage. Any re-assessment should be carried out in line with the centre's own assessment policy.

Assessors are reminded that achievement of the minimum evidence criteria will mean that the learner should be awarded a pass graded at C. Where the learner has submitted work which contains more than the minimum evidence, then additional marks may be awarded to enable the learner to be awarded either a grade B or an A.

All minimum evidence must be achieved and the learner will be awarded half the section marks for doing so. Given the assessment and grading allowed in the Evidence Requirement statement, this would allow a maximum of 12 additional marks that could be awarded for the planning stage, 32 additional marks could be awarded for the developing stage, and 6 additional marks for the evaluation stage. Assessors should develop a clear marking guideline which identifies where additional marks may be awarded.

## Higher National Project-based Graded Unit Specification: Designing the project and assessing learners (cont)

**Graded Unit title:** Soft Tissue Therapy: Graded Unit 1

Grade Related Criteria	
Grade A	Grade C
<p>Is a seamless, coherent piece of work which:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♦ has sufficient evidence for the three essential phases of the project, is produced to a high standard and is quite clearly inter-related</li> <li>♦ demonstrates an accurate and insightful interpretation of the project brief</li> <li>♦ is highly focused and relevant to the tasks associated with the project brief</li> <li>♦ is clear and well-structured throughout and language used is of a high standard in terms of level, accuracy and technical content</li> <li>♦ effectively consolidates and integrates required knowledge and skills</li> <li>♦ demonstrates the learner's ability to work autonomously</li> </ul>	<p>Is a co-ordinated piece of work which:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♦ has sufficient evidence of the three essential phases of the project, which are produced to an adequate standard</li> <li>♦ demonstrates an acceptable interpretation of the project brief</li> <li>♦ is focused and relevant to the tasks associated with the project brief</li> <li>♦ is satisfactorily structured and language used is adequate in terms of level, accuracy and technical content</li> <li>♦ consolidates and integrates knowledge and skills but this may lack some continuity and consistency</li> <li>♦ demonstrates independent learning with minimum support and revision during the project</li> </ul>

The marks allocated to each stage will then be aggregated to arrive at an overall mark for the project. Assessors will then assign an overall grade to the learner for this Graded Unit based on the following grade boundaries.

A	=	70%–100%
B	=	60%–69%
C	=	50%–59%

These grade boundaries are fixed and should **not** be amended.

Any learner who has failed their graded unit or wishes to upgrade their award must be given a re-assessment opportunity, or in exceptional circumstances, two re-assessment opportunities. In the case of project-based graded units, this must be done using a substantially different project.

The final grading given must reflect the quality of the learner's evidence at the time of the completion of the graded unit. Learners must be awarded the highest grade achieved — whether through first submission or through any re-assessment, remediation, and/or reasonable assistance provided.



## Higher National Project-based Graded Unit Support Notes

**Graded Unit title:** Soft Tissue Therapy: Graded Unit 1

### Guidance on approaches to delivery and assessment of this Graded Unit

Whilst it is expected that the delivery of this Unit would occur in the latter half of the course, learners should be made overtly aware of the nature of the piece of work by members of the course team much earlier; for example, during the delivery of other Units as appropriate issues arise. This may help learners to form ideas and identify some of the key points they wish to investigate ensuring a smoother passage through the Unit itself. It is expected that the Unit lecturer/assessor would be familiar with the content and complexities of all Units within the award in order to be able to guide the learner appropriately, particularly in the pre-planning stage. Where this is not the case, it would be the responsibility of the course team to share and discuss appropriate ideas and lend support to the assessor.

At the commencement of the Graded Unit it is recommended that the learner should have completed, or be in the process of completing, the following Units;

- ◆ *Sports Therapy: Anatomy and Physiology*
- ◆ *Functional Anatomy*
- ◆ *Basic Subjective and Objective Assessment*
- ◆ *Clinical Sports Massage*
- ◆ *Sports Massage for Events and Special Populations*
- ◆ *Pathology and Aetiology of Sports Injury*
- ◆ *Prevention and Management of Sports Injury*
- ◆ *Sports Therapy: Professional Standards*
- ◆ *Clinical and Team Experience 1*

The following word counts for each section of this project are provided as guidance only and are not prescriptive:

Planning	1000
Development	1500
Evaluation	500

It is recommended that lecturer/assessors outline a timetable for progress interviews during the planning and developing stages at the commencement of the Unit so that learners are fully aware of the timescales by which they need to produce information. A record of the interview, with action points outlined and signed by learner and lecturer/assessor, should be kept for the purposes of verification.

## Higher National Project-based Graded Unit Support Notes (cont)

**Graded Unit title:** Soft Tissue Therapy: Graded Unit 1

### Opportunities for developing Core and other essential skills

There is no automatic certification of Core Skills or Core Skill components as part of this Graded Unit. However, it offers the learner opportunities to extend *Communication*, *Information and Communication Technology (ICT)* and *Problem Solving* skills in that qualitative and quantitative information must be researched from several sources, including secondary and primary. The information must be analysed and represented in a structured, coherent, logical manner to demonstrate the achievement of stated aims and objectives.

## History of changes to Graded Unit

Version	Description of change	Date
02	Removal of the requirement of a presentation as part of the evaluation stage.	24/09/14
03	Rationalisation of Planning, Development and Evaluation stages for centres.	05/09/18

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## General information for learners

### Graded Unit title: Soft Tissue Therapy: Graded Unit 1

Prior to starting the Graded Unit, lecturers/assessors should provide learners with comprehensive information about the Unit, the brief, and the means by which they are assessed. As a minimum, this should include:

- ◆ What the Unit is about, eg principal aims
- ◆ What they have to know, eg topics from underpinning Units
- ◆ How they will be assessed
- ◆ Timing of assessment, eg when will the project begin, interim interviews, final submission date
- ◆ What the basis of grading achievement will be
- ◆ Any opportunities to develop Core Skills, eg through particular activities

An example would be:

Your Graded Unit is an investigation-type project that requires you to bring together the knowledge and skills that you have learned across the whole HNC award. It is designed to show that you have achieved the following principal aims of the course:

- ◆ Developed critical and evaluative thinking and ability to manage and absorb large amounts of information
- ◆ Developed self-directed and self-reflective learning skills
- ◆ Developed the ability to be flexible and work co-operatively within a team structure
- ◆ Developed core and transferable skills (study and research skills, personal effectiveness)
- ◆ Gained understanding of Anatomy, Physiology, Pathology, Assessment Techniques and Management of Sports Injuries in order to analyse, plan and evaluate appropriate soft tissue treatment
- ◆ Developed knowledge and skill in the administering of accurate and appropriate soft tissue treatment and the provision of appropriate after and home care
- ◆ Developed an evidence-based approach to treatment planning

The underpinning knowledge required for your project is likely to be drawn from the Units on *Anatomy and Physiology*, *Functional Anatomy and Pathology and Aetiology of Sports Injury*, however, you may draw heavily on the massage Units, the *Prevention and Management of Sports Injuries*, or *Professional Standards*. Examples of the type of project you may do are as follows:

- ◆ Rationale and evidence-based for the use of a specific technique introduced in Clinical Sports Massage
- ◆ Effectiveness of pre-event massage on sporting performance
- ◆ Effectiveness of post-event massage on sporting performance
- ◆ Effectiveness of soft-tissue therapy on injury rehabilitation
- ◆ Effectiveness of specific thermal therapy techniques on performance recovery
- ◆ Incidence and/or prevalence of injuries in a sport with which the learner is not familiar (has never had any involvement)
- ◆ Rehabilitation approaches to significant/severe injuries

## General information for learners (cont)

### Graded Unit title: Soft Tissue Therapy: Graded Unit 1

- ◆ The debate over appropriate certification for Soft Tissue/Sports Therapy practitioners
- ◆ The requirement for professional associations and self-regulating bodies in Soft Tissue and Sports Therapy

This list is not exhaustive and you may discuss other options with your lecturer/assessor (alternatively, the lecturer/assessor in agreement with the course team may set a more specific brief).

Your project is in three stages:

Stage 1: this is the planning stage. You have to analyse your task and plan how you are going to carry it out. You decide on the aims and objectives, the key sources of information and how you are going to collect that information. You are likely to use both quantitative and qualitative research methods and both primary and secondary sources (don't worry if you don't know what these terms mean yet — they will be explained to you). Although you will be given deadlines for when each stage must be submitted, you will have to produce timescales for the tasks that you need to complete in the second and third stages, and you will have to produce a contingency plan "what you will do if things don't go exactly as you have planned). You have to achieve this stage before moving onto stage 2.

Stage 2: this is the developing stage. This is where you carry out all of the tasks and collect all of the evidence that you have planned to collect using the research methods and sources that you identified in your plan, while keeping to your set timescales as much as possible. Again, you have to achieve this stage before moving onto stage 3.

Stage 3: this is the evaluation stage. In this stage you evaluate how your project went. It is more than just a '*went well/didn't go so well!*' You will have set criteria against which you will evaluate your project (eg did it meet the aims and objectives?), and you will evaluate your performance of carrying out the process of the project (eg planning, implementing the plan, collecting the information, reporting and such like).

The Graded Unit is marked differently to other Units, you are awarded marks for each stage: 24 for planning, 64 for developing, 12 for evaluation. In each stage, there are certain criteria you must achieve and if you do that you will be awarded half the available marks. For additional relevant information you may be awarded extra marks. The marks for each stage are added together to give you a final grade as follows:

A	=	70%–100%
B	=	60%–69%
C	=	50%–59%

You will have to analyse and present the information in a structured, coherent, logical manner to demonstrate that the project has achieved the stated aims and objectives. Depending on the type of project you undertake, you may also enhance your skills in working co-operatively with others, if for example, you are involved in several meetings with another professional where information is not only sought but shared for the purposes of collaboration.