



**Higher National Qualifications**

**Qualification Verification Summary Report 2017**

**Business Management and Business  
Graded Unit**

## Introduction

The following units were selected for verification:

### Business Management units

F84T 34	Managing People and Organisations SCQF level 7
F7J7 35	Business Culture and Strategy SCQF level 8
H7V4 34	Preparing to Start a Business SCQF level 7
H7V5 34	Preparing a Formal Business Plan SCQF level 7

### Business graded units

F8LE 35	Business: Graded Unit 2 SCQF level 8
F8LD 34	Business: Graded Unit 1 SCQF level 7

All units are current and were not revised in the 2016–17 session.

The majority of verification activity was completed during centre visits. Business Graded Unit 1 was verified at a central event.

## Category 2: Resources

### **Criterion 2.4: There must be evidence of initial and ongoing reviews of assessment environments; equipment; and reference, learning and assessment materials.**

All centres visited had systems in place to ensure ongoing reviews. These systems included formal operational planning cycles where the learning environment is systematically reviewed and plans made to ensure that necessary changes are made. Individual staff regularly add materials and update learning materials, many being made accessible via a virtual learning environment. Further evidence of reviews was apparent in records of meetings that formed part of the internal quality system.

For the examination-based graded unit (graded unit 1), centres selected assessments from the four SQA-produced assessment support packs available.

Centres also used the SQA-produced assessment support pack (ASP) for graded unit 2 and, in many cases, also used the HN enhancements checklist which integrates the project with research skills. Some centres used their own version of the checklist. Candidates commonly received the guidance sections from the ASP.

For the Business Management units verified, centres mostly used the SQA-produced ASP. A modest number of centres used the HN enhancements combined assessments for Business Culture and Strategy/Behavioural Skills.

## **Category 3: Candidate support**

### **Criterion 3.2: Candidates' development needs and prior achievements (where appropriate) must be matched against the requirements of the award.**

Centres usually interviewed potential candidates, who had applied for the HNC/D. Those that were successful were given an induction of varying duration and intensity.

All centres operated a system of dedicated pastoral care, usually with a student advisor/mentor. In some centres there were regular timetabled guidance slots, often accompanied by mandatory face-to-face review sessions. All centres provided access to specialist support services that candidates could accessed as required.

### **Criterion 3.3: Candidates must have scheduled contact with their assessor to review their progress and to revise their assessment plans accordingly.**

Centres timetabled formal slots for the units. Assessors could be contacted outside class times often by e-mail, but sometimes at their staff base as well. In the business plan units there was a greater emphasis on guidance and supervision rather than taught content. Sometimes candidates were given templates with a structure for their business plan.

In the project classes it was common to have scheduled meetings with individual candidates, but some had a less formal review process where progress was mapped during the class times. All candidates received verbal and written feedback that varied in length and detail.

For the examination, centres delivered the unit within scheduled class times, which mainly focused on exam technique. Some centres covered the contributing units' content again to a limited extent, and all used practice case studies and questions to help develop the skills required for the examination. Some centres use a prelim paper as formative assessment to help candidates prepare for the examination.

## **Category 4: Internal assessment and verification**

### **Criterion 4.2: Internal assessment and verification procedures must be implemented to ensure standardisation of assessment.**

All centres provided an internal verification policy and completed internal verification records. The detail contained in the records varied, with the most basic being a checklist and recognition that assessment decisions had been accepted with a 'yes or no' result. The more useful records contained narrative, identifying points that had required some thought, or might need explanation or changing. Some records contained explicit actions for future implementation along with timescales. These more detailed and reflective accounts that help provide a better foundation for standardisation and the correct judgement of the standard; the basic records add little extra value.

The assessment procedures for the two graded units were well understood. Some centres allow candidates to type examination responses which, providing security measures are in place, is acceptable. All centres appeared to run the project across the year rather than over a single

semester or in two out of three blocks. Many centres integrated research skills within the project, and provided dedicated time for the delivery of research skills.

In the main, assessment procedures for the Business Management units were also straightforward and well understood. Some centres allow candidates greater freedom in completing the business plan units than others. Most centres ran the 2-credit units across the year rather than over a single semester or in two out of three blocks.

**Criterion 4.3: Assessment instruments and methods and their selection and use must be valid, reliable, practicable, equitable and fair.**

#### **Business Management units**

Centres used SQA-produced assessments or, in a very small number of cases, a locally devised version based on the SQA ASP. The assessment instruments were usually checked before they were used, and this check was recorded in an internal verification record. There were few records indicating that there were any problems with the SQA assessments, and they were accepted as being valid, reliable, equitable and fair.

One centre using the HN enhancements combined assessment (F7J7 35) indicated that there was a bias in one part of the assessment towards the Behavioural Skills unit. All centres had the up-to-date unit specification for each unit. Where candidates had justifiable cause, assessment conditions could be adapted to meet those specific needs. All centres provided candidates with access to specialist support services and diagnostic tests if required.

#### **Business graded units**

All centres were using SQA-produced assessments for both graded units. The assessment instruments were usually checked before they were used, and this check was recorded in an internal verification record. There were no records indicating that there were any problems with the SQA assessments, and they were accepted as being valid, reliable, equitable and fair. All centres had the up-to-date unit specification for each unit. Where candidates had justifiable cause, assessment conditions could be adapted to meet those specific needs. All centres provided candidates with access to specialist support services and diagnostic tests if required.

**Criterion 4.4: Assessment evidence must be the candidate's own work, generated under SQA's required conditions.**

Centres provided a malpractice/plagiarism policy. In most cases candidates had to sign an authenticity declaration during their induction. The use of Turnitin is becoming increasingly common for units such as Managing People and Organisations, but less so for the project graded unit. The nature of the candidate evidence for the project tends to reduce the opportunity for copying, and Turnitin was increasingly being used to provide electronic feedback. For the graded units the evidence reviewed was generated under the conditions set by SQA.

There were a modest number of instances where copying or poor referencing were identified. In the business planning units, the nature of the candidate evidence tends to reduce the opportunity for copying. All evidence reviewed was generated under the conditions set by SQA for these particular units.

**Criterion 4.6: Evidence of candidates' work must be accurately and consistently judged by assessors against SQA's requirements.**

**Business Management units**

In general centres are familiar with the units and the assessments for the units. Where candidates' work was judged to be unsatisfactory, they were asked to remediate the appropriate sections and their evidence was re-assessed. The relevant standards were identified and applied.

There was a degree of variation in the quality of the work produced for the two business planning units. This could be attributed to enthusiastic candidates creating more detailed business proposals than the minimum requirements because they genuinely wish to establish a new business.

Assessors provided feedback on the scripts or using checklists, and a growing number used Turnitin to mark and provide feedback. Records of meetings suggest there is a growing recognition of the importance of standardisation activity in arriving at sound assessment decisions.

**Business graded units**

The projects scrutinised had marks indicated on the marking sheets. Some centres very clearly identified the basic pass marks needed, but others were less specific. All markers did identify why additional marks had been awarded against the additional mark criteria. Some were quite specific about where additional marks were gained, but others used vague terms such as 'the level of language' as justification for awarding additional marks.

There was some variation in marking in the projects and centres need to reflect on whether overall high marks are justified. Some recalibration of marks downwards is required so that very good work attains an A, good work a B, and adequate work a C. This can be achieved by studying the A and C grading table in the ASP and unit specification. If markers are freely marking across the whole 100-mark range, then there is a tendency for A grades to be awarded for work that does not merit it. If markers tend to view very good work being in the 70 to 80% range (truly exceptional work being higher), then it reduces the chance of B-grade projects being dragged upwards over the 70% threshold, which is likely when marks in the 80s or above are being commonly awarded.

**Criterion 4.7: Candidate evidence must be retained in line with SQA requirements.**

Centres continue to retain all candidate evidence and assessment records in line with SQA requirements. Many centres retain candidate evidence for a longer period than required by SQA. All centres recognised the need for security during storage.

**Criterion 4.9: Feedback from qualification verifiers must be disseminated to staff and used to inform assessment practice.**

Centres demonstrated they have effective processes in place to ensure dissemination of feedback from external verification activity. At some centres this took place and was recorded at internal verification meetings. Qualification verification reports were commonly available in electronic format.

**Areas of good practice reported by qualification verifiers**

The following good practice was reported during session 2016–17:

**Business Management units**

- ◆ Centres using ‘Dragons Den’ events to allow candidates to present their business proposals.
- ◆ Assessors providing quality and detailed feedback to candidates.
- ◆ Centres encouraging candidates to use a recognised referencing system and providing excellent referencing guidance.
- ◆ Centres providing excellent online resources through a virtual learning environment.
- ◆ Candidates receiving end-of-block ‘you said, we did’ reviews.
- ◆ Centres implementing a ‘quality week’ between blocks.
- ◆ Centres carrying suitable business proposals forward through an incubator unit.

**Business graded units**

- ◆ Some centres use templates for parts of the project unit. These included templates for the skills audit, reflective log, project plan, and for evaluating sources of information. These generally enhanced candidate responses by encouraging them to provide detail. It is important to stress that templates are not mandatory as candidates may wish to innovate, which is to be encouraged.
- ◆ One centre implemented a supportive progress review for candidates wishing to move from HNC to HND. Candidates were judged on their ability and commitment before being accepted into year two and there was not an automatic right of progression based on attaining 15 HN credits. Other potential options were identified for candidates who had struggled and were thought unlikely to be able to complete the HND. There was an excellent use of a blog in Blackboard as a means of communication.
- ◆ There were several examples of an excellent level of candidate support in centres.
- ◆ Cross-marking was particularly well utilised to assist in standardisation between assessors.
- ◆ There was an increased use of Turnitin for marking and providing excellent feedback.

## **Specific areas for development**

The following areas for development were reported during session 2016–17:

### **Business Management units**

- ◆ In the business planning units, candidates can easily fall behind. Giving a degree of freedom to candidates for their own learning has to be balanced with a structured and scheduled approach to delivery and assessment. Asking candidates to submit parts of their business plan in chunks against a schedule helps to reduce the risk.
- ◆ Interim internal verification can provide a good progress check during the delivery of the business planning units.

### **Business graded units**

- ◆ For the project, internal verification is best carried out during delivery rather than after all three stages have been completed. This is particularly important where new staff are involved.
- ◆ Assessors should use the grade table from the ASP and unit specification before deciding on a final grade for a project. The project should be viewed in its entirety and the marks used as an indicator of a grade rather than a definitive measure. The unit is a graded unit and while a mark indicates a grade, it is important that the grade awarded is merited. In some cases, centres may need to recalibrate marking so that the grades awarded are reflective of the work produced. This is best achieved through reflection and discussion. Many centres already adopt a reflective approach.
- ◆ When marking the examination it is important to check that responses have not been missed. Also, there should be close scrutiny of marks at grade boundaries and in particular in the high 40s.