



Higher National Graded Units

Qualification Verification Summary Report 2017

Social Sciences

Introduction

FM67 34	Social Sciences: Graded Unit 1 (Examination)
FM68 35	Social Sciences: Graded Unit 2 (Project)
FM6A 35	Social Sciences: Graded Unit 3 (Examination)

The examinations were verified at a central verification event in June. Eight centres were asked to submit scripts — four for Graded Unit 1 and four for Graded Unit 3.

Graded Unit 2 (Project) was looked at in two centres during visits by external verifiers.

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.

It is the practice in centres for these issues to be reviewed at a course team meeting either at the end of a session or the beginning of the next. The nature of the Graded Unit Project assessment and the issues surrounding it are also considered at the pre-internal verification meetings.

The centres visited produced evidence to substantiate this practice, but in other instances, this information is not forthcoming, isn't properly recorded, and has to be requested.

Category 3: Candidate support

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

The Graded Unit Project is part of the second year of the HND Social Sciences award, and by that time, candidates have had an introduction to and experience of project work to equip them to undertake this task.

This unit can build on knowledge and experience gained during the first year Investigation unit, if offered by the centre. Candidates commented on how helpful it was to undertake this unit in their first year. It is also delivered over the course of the academic year so that content can be built on during topics in the C units. Candidates are invited to submit a proposal form prior to undertaking the full planning stage. This helps build confidence in the unit through a more familiar entry to it. A series of one-hour workshops can be held to build up the necessary skills for the unit.

Constructive sessions held early in the course can include a session where candidates have to identify and produce a relevant journal article, which they then analyse and source during the taught slot.

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

Meetings are structured formally at the beginning of the project unit and are ongoing either on a regular or ad hoc basis as required. These can be used to build academic skills. Assessors advise as to which areas need to be considered more fully in order to meet minimum evidence requirements. In one of the centres visited, they have the option of submitting a draft developing stage in January which can identify any areas that require attention. Assessors can also verify that the candidate evidence produced reflects the candidate's own work. Specialist subject knowledge is accessible through their tutors for the individual disciplines. Feedback on the optional draft submission allows 'fatal flaws' to be identified when they can still be rectified prior to their main submission. This feedback is constructive in terms of deficit areas, in line with SQA limitations.

Category 4: Internal assessment and verification

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

SQA advocates the three-stage assessment and internal verification process — pre-assessment, during assessment, and post-assessment (stage two is not appropriate for the examinations but it is appropriate for the project). Centre procedures mirror these requirements, but evidence is recorded in different ways — a tick-box checklist or fuller IV minutes. Providing fuller detail is more useful. College procedures are followed but occasionally all paperwork was not offered to the external verifiers on visits and at central verification and had to be requested.

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

In the Social Sciences, we encourage centres to submit their assessments to SQA for prior verification. This is now common practice with the examinations but not always with the project. With the examination, in some cases only the initial exam paper and marking guidelines are submitted and not the resit exam. It makes sense that the resit paper be submitted together with the initial paper so that the possibility of the similarity of questions can be ruled out.

Once the assessments have gone through the centres' internal verification processes and have been prior verified by SQA, they will be 'fit for purpose' in terms the above requirements. It is always helpful if the centres submit their SQA approval certificate to the external verifiers to satisfy them that this has been done.

Very occasionally, actions occur which cannot be approved. One centre submitted an assessment as having been prior approved but had, in fact, changed one of the questions *after* approval. SQA has also gone to a lot of trouble to create templates to be used for the marking guidelines and while most assessors utilise these, some devise their own which do not conform to the rest of the questions in the paper. Worst still there have been examples where the guidelines submitted for approval have utilised the templates but after the assessments, these templates have been ignored by some assessors. Prior approval is about approving the marking guidelines as much as it is about approving the assessment questions.

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

With the examinations being taken under the appropriate conditions there is little chance of malpractice although similarity between answers would throw up the suspicion of collusion.

Through interviews and examination of the work produced, assessors can satisfy themselves that projects are the candidates' own work and programmes like Turnitin can verify this.

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

In all but one instance, the candidates' work was being correctly judged against SQA standards. The whole process of marking, cross-marking and then internal and external verification along with feedback to candidates is made much more straight forward when use is made of the SQA marking guidelines templates. Further clarity is added when the marking on the candidates' scripts is labelled KU or EC and some connection to the appropriate mark allocation is indicated on the template form. This enables everyone to see exactly how each candidate achieved the mark awarded. Records relating to the adjustment of marks during cross-marking or internal verification give further insight into the determination of the mark finally awarded. Some scripts have no ticks, comments, or marks on them and everything is recorded solely on the marking sheet. This is less helpful and should be discouraged.

A further feature in use in some centres is a coversheet on each candidate's script that records what questions were answered, the mark gained for each, the total mark achieved, and the grade awarded. Without this, verifiers have to add up the marks for themselves to determine the grade gained. All this information should be submitted for central verification.

At central verification, although only a sample number of scripts are submitted, it is extremely useful when a full list of all candidates with their grades is included. This gives an idea of how representative the sample is.

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

In all cases, the evidence required to be seen by SQA was made available, so this rule is being satisfied.

On visits, one is invariably told that centres retain candidates' work for longer than the period specified by SQA.

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

As far as the Graded Unit Projects are concerned, the practice demonstrated to the external verifiers was that feedback is intrinsic to the quality teams. They will disseminate the feedback to the faculty manager and/or the curriculum manager, who will then disseminate it to the course team by email or the report will be made available to them on the intranet. Information within the report will inform subsequent verification and standardisation activity. It can be assumed that the same practice is followed with the reports from central verification.

It is important that assessors and verifiers have continuing access to the report and its contents and are not just given a verbal account at the team meeting.

Areas of good practice report by qualification verifiers

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

- ◆ Clear and full records of internal verification at all appropriate stages was made available.
- ◆ Marking on candidates' scripts informs how much credit was awarded for each point or argument made.

Specific areas for development

The following area for development was reported during session 2016–17:

- ◆ Centres, assessors, and internal verifiers need to be reminded of what exact evidence may be required by SQA during a QV visit or for central verification. The absence of such evidence can hold up the process of approval along with the accompanying anxiety.
- ◆ Possibly for central verification, SQA (in consultation with the appropriate SEVs) can send out more precise instructions as to what exactly the centres should submit by way of evidence.