

# Appendix 1: Design principles for developing HNCs and HNDs

HNCs and HNDs have supported technician, technologist and first line manager occupations for over 75 years, including progression in professional qualifications and other higher education awards. More recently, some HNs have been specifically designed to support progression from Modern Apprenticeships and to degrees.

In order to continue serving these occupations, HN programme designers should adhere to the following design principles. Design teams must always conduct market research, particularly among candidates and employers to ensure the continuing fitness for purpose of the HNs. Where this clearly indicates that any of those design principles marked with an asterisk needs to be re-interpreted or modified, SQA will work with the design team to develop alternatives, which are coherent with the other principles.

The validity of the market research and the fitness for purpose of the proposed alternatives will be confirmed at validation.

Further considerations for design teams are also indicated.

## (a) Design principles

### SCQF level and SCQF points

- 1 HNCs shall be designed to be at SCQF level 7 and shall comprise 96 SCQF credit points.
- 2 HNDs shall be designed to be at SCQF level 8 and shall comprise 240 SCQF credit points.
- 3 HNCs should incorporate 48 SCQF credit points at SCQF level 7.
- 4 HNDs should incorporate 64 SCQF credit points at SCQF level 8.

### Core Skills

- 5 HNC and HND programmes shall incorporate opportunities for candidates to develop Core Skills.
- 6 \*HNCs and HNDs should clearly include opportunities for candidates to develop Core Skills to levels required by the occupations or progression pathways the HNs support. This would mean all five Core Skills should be developed in every HN programme.

## **Mandatory section**

- 7 HNCs should include a mandatory section of at least 48 SCQF credits points including a Graded Unit. (See Principles 9 and 10 *under 'Graded Units'* below.)
- 8 HNDs should include a mandatory section of at least 96 SCQF points, including Graded Units.

## **Graded Units**

- 9 \*HNCs should include one Graded Unit of 8 SCQF credit points at SCQF level 7.
- 10 \*HNDs should include one Graded Unit of 8 SCQF credit points at SCQF level 7 plus 16 SCQF credit points of Graded Unit(s) at SCQF level 8.

The purposes of Graded Units will be to assess the candidate's ability to integrate and apply the knowledge and/or skills gained in the individual HN Units to demonstrate that they have the principal aims of the Group Award, and grade candidate achievement.

## **(b) Further considerations**

### **HN Unit and Graded Unit specifications**

SQA produces guidance on how to write HN Unit and Graded Unit specifications. These include templates and examples of how the specifications should be laid out. This guidance should always be used in developing new or revised HN Unit or Graded Unit specifications. The minimum change to current Unit specifications would be to remove the merit statement and to add an SCQF level and SCQF credit points.

### **Validation of HN Unit specifications**

A key part of validation is to confirm the proposed allocation of SCQF levels and SCQF credit points to each Unit, and this needs to be seen to be done consistently.

Until the process of devolving this to centres is fully worked out, SQA will validate all new or revised HN Unit specifications. Centres may continue to develop HN Unit specifications for validation by SQA.

### **Validation of HN Group Awards and group award Graded Units**

Group Award validation may continue to be done by those centres with devolved powers to do so. As Graded Units relate to the principal aims of a Group Award, these too may be validated by devolved centres as part of Group Awards.

### **Validation periods**

HN Units, Graded Units and Group Awards will be kept under review by design teams in order to ensure continuing fitness for purpose. Normally, these will be reviewed every five years or more frequently if recommended by validation panels. However, specific time periods of validation will not be specified.