



**Higher National and Vocational Qualifications
Internal Assessment Report 2014
Construction Technician**

The purpose of this report is to provide feedback to centres on verification in Higher National and Scottish Vocational Qualifications in this subject.

Higher National Units

General comments

This is the eighth year of delivery of the suite of HN awards. As a result, it is abundantly clear from the comments in the External Verifiers' reports that the staff in all centres have a very clear and accurate understanding of the requirements of the national standards. These standards are observed and actively promoted throughout the delivery and assessment of the HN Units.

Unit specifications, instruments of assessment and exemplification materials

Many of the tutors/ assessors are thoroughly familiar with the full suite of Unit specifications, instruments of assessment and SQA-derived exemplar materials. This is evidenced by the quality and quantity of alternative instruments of assessment and associated marking schedules that have been designed and implemented by centre staff. It is significant that a number of centres apply for prior verification of alternative assessment materials before delivery and presentation to candidates.

There have been no significant issues of misinterpretation of Unit specifications or standards noted in this session's external verification audits. In one centre it was considered that some over-assessment of candidates had taken place. This was due to the assessor not fully observing the sampling strategies set out in the Unit specifications. In keeping with SQA philosophy, the External Verifier offered guidance and direction in order to enhance understanding and delivery in order to promote good practice.

Evidence Requirements

Generally, throughout the external verification process this session, the External Verifiers have observed confirmation of clear understanding of the Evidence Requirements as stated in the Unit specifications. However, the exception, as noted above, led to some over-assessment in a very small selection of Units in only one centre.

Administration of assessments

As 'regionalisation' progresses through the sector, many centres are still co-ordinating the variety of quality systems that existed in their constituent campuses. However, despite this challenge, all centres that were audited demonstrated robust structural systems that ably supported the range of quality issues — including assessment planning, delivery and curriculum review, assessment and internal verification.

In many centres the harmonising of the standardisation of assessment and internal verification processes across constituent campuses is not yet fully implemented.

Many External Verifiers reported that a majority of centres have developed highly sophisticated and effective electronic systems to manage, record and store all documentation that supports delivery, learning, tutorial, assessment and verification activities. This improves accessibility for the learner and enhances and reinforces the learner/tutor relationship.

Most centres actively contribute to and support the Built Environment Qualifications Support Team, and recently the Qualifications Development Team, as the NC and HN Awards have been reviewed. Through these forums, there is considerable exploration and sharing of good practice that enhances the delivery of all awards in the Built Environment suite.

General feedback

In almost all cases, feedback to learners was good and in some cases, exemplary. There was considerable evidence in learners' scripts and portfolios of comprehensive feedback that was valid, relevant and informative. There were some very minor exceptions where feedback to candidates was unverifiable.

In some centres, feedback to learners was recorded (in e-mail form) through the virtual learning portal thereby enhancing the learning process through accessibility.

Without exception, feedback from candidates commended the support and guidance offered by tutors and support staff in all aspects of learning. Candidates spoke highly of the professionalism and dedication of the tutors and their accessibility not only through the new virtual learning portals, but also outwith programmed delivery classes.

There was some minor criticism of assessment burden, but most centres countered this by forward planning of assessment events and integration of Unit Outcomes.

There were no apparent barriers to assessment. Most centres demonstrated a flexible approach to timing and co-ordination of assessment events.

Areas of good practice

In most centres, staff had taken the necessary steps to try to ensure that the candidates' learning experience was insulated from most of the exigencies of radical change in the sector.

Several centres have developed/adopted sophisticated electronic learning portals which offer easy and constant access for candidates to lecture notes, assessment feedback and advice and guidance notes.

Some tutors/assessors make use of social media to communicate and support candidates.

Specific areas for improvement

A few issues were identified in a very small minority of centres as follows:

- ◆ Misinterpretation of Evidence Requirements resulting in over-assessment.
- ◆ Internal verification and standardisation were not consistent over all campuses.

Higher National Graded Units

Titles/levels of HN Graded Units verified:

DX20 34	Construction Graded Unit 1
DX21 34	Construction Management Graded Unit 1
DX1X 34	Architectural Technology Graded Unit 1
DX1Y 34	Building Surveying Graded Unit 1
DX27 35	Construction Management Graded Unit 2
DX23 35	Building Surveying Graded Unit 2

General comments

It was clear from all External Verifiers' reports, centre documentation and from candidates' portfolios, that almost all staff in all centres have a clear and comprehensive understanding of the requirements of national standards demanded by the Graded Units in the Built Environment suite of awards.

The one exception to the observation above was presented by one member of staff in a centre where the Graded Unit was being delivered for the first time. Standards were not fully observed and under the agreed Action Plan, some re-marking was required in order to comply with the standards.

Unit specifications, instruments of assessment and exemplification materials

With the exception of the case noted above, it is quite apparent that all assessors and internal verifiers are extremely familiar with the demands of the Graded Unit specifications as well as instruments of assessment and the SQA-produced exemplar materials. All centres have now produced an array of alternative instruments of assessment, most of which are extremely well designed, relevant and relate directly to 'live' or viable local construction projects.

All of these alternative assessment materials have either been subjected to prior verification processes or external verification scrutiny.

Evidence Requirements

Throughout the external verification processes this session, there has only been one significant instance of misinterpretation of any of the elements of the Graded Unit programme. As highlighted earlier, the issue was a lack of application of national standards to certain elements of candidates' submissions resulting in perceived generous marking. After proper application of the appropriate standards, the revised marking and grades were deemed acceptable.

Administration of assessments

As 'regionalisation' progresses through the sector, many centres are still co-ordinating the variety of quality systems that existed in their constituent

campuses. However, despite this challenge, all centres audited demonstrated robust structural systems that ably supported the range of quality issues including assessment planning, delivery and curriculum review, assessment and internal verification.

In many centres the harmonising of the standardisation of assessment and internal verification processes across constituent campuses is not yet fully implemented.

Many External Verifiers reported that a majority of centres have developed highly sophisticated and effective electronic systems to manage, record and store all documentation that supports delivery, learning, tutorial, assessment and verification activities. This improves accessibility for the learner and enhances and reinforces the learner/tutor relationship.

Most centres actively contribute to and support the Built Environment Qualifications Support Team, and recently the Qualifications Development Team, as the NC and HN Awards have been reviewed. Through these forums, there is considerable exploration and sharing of good practice that enhances the delivery of all awards in the Built Environment suite.

In some centres the delivery of the Graded Unit is the prerogative of the principal tutor in that specific discipline. In other centres, a 'team' approach is adopted with tutors delivering and marking within their specific disciplines. Both systems are demonstrably valid and robust as evidenced in the External Verifiers' reports. In addition, several centres also practise cross-marking of all submissions thereby applying standardisation and internal verification processes concurrently.

Many centres, using exemplar materials as their skeleton, have designed and developed Graded Unit instruments of assessment that are based on local 'live' or viable construction proposals that are quite appropriate, valid and extremely relevant to the local infrastructure.

All centres have in place 'sanctions' policies that are applied to candidates who fail to meet the agreed submission dates for elements of work contributing to the Graded Units. These policies reflect and reinforce the conditions which are experienced in the wider Built Environment industry and have met with support from higher education institutes.

There is general criticism within the centres, of the Grade Boundary for the A Grade pass in all Graded Units. The spread of 30% across the A Grade is considered to be too broad and does not adequately differentiate or reward the higher achieving candidates. It is significant that in interview, learners also expressed dissatisfaction with the upper grade boundaries.

General feedback

In almost all cases, feedback to learners was good and in some cases, exemplary. There was considerable evidence in learners' scripts and portfolios of comprehensive feedback that was valid, relevant and informative.

In some centres, feedback to learners was recorded (in e-mail form) through the virtual learning portal thereby enhancing the learning process through accessibility.

Without exception, feedback from candidates commended the support and guidance offered by tutors and support staff in all aspects of learning. Candidates spoke highly of the professionalism and dedication of the tutors and their accessibility not only through the new virtual learning portals, but also outwith programmed delivery classes.

Many candidates spoke of their comparative 'enjoyment' of the Graded Unit portfolio development. They highlighted how the integration of the content of several Units enhanced learning and promoted deeper understanding of the intricacies and demands of the construction industry.

As noted earlier, some concern was expressed by candidates about the Grade Boundaries of the A Grade being too broad and not awarding the high achievers appropriately.

It is quite evident that there are no barriers to access to learning or assessment. Candidates, without exception, spoke of accessibility of tutors/ assessors and flexibility of assessment events to suit delivery and attendance regimes.

Areas of good practice

Many examples of good practice were observed across all centres that were audited this session. External Verifiers highlighted the following elements deserving special mention:

- ◆ The use of Moodle or similar electronic learning portals to provide a forum for candidates and tutors to communicate individually and collectively during the currency of the award.
- ◆ The support and mentoring of candidates through electronic portals or hard-copy documentation was extremely well done in all centres.
- ◆ The use of social media to communicate with candidates is innovative.
- ◆ Fully documented feedback to candidates that was always relevant, valid and constructive.
- ◆ Design of Graded Unit instruments of assessment to embrace significant local development content thus increasing relevance and wider understanding of the industry as a whole.
- ◆ Much of the centre-developed documentation which supports the Graded Unit delivery is exemplary.

- ◆ The ongoing establishment and integration of sophisticated electronic/IT-based quality assurance systems are already enhancing the verification processes.

Specific areas for improvement

A few issues were identified in a very small number of centres as follows:

- ◆ There was a perceived lack of observation of national standards in the marking of specific elements in the candidate submissions — one centre only.
- ◆ Standardisation and internal verification processes not consistent over all campuses.
- ◆ Documentation to confirm standardisation and internal verification activities not always available.
- ◆ The quality (and quantity) of referencing within candidates' bibliographies is highly variable.

SVQ awards

General comments

Evidence presented in the External Verifiers' reports confirms that all staff in all centres have a clear and accurate understanding of the requirements of the national standards embraced by the array of awards that were audited this session.

Unit specifications, instruments of assessment and exemplification materials

It is quite apparent that all assessors and internal verifiers are very familiar with the Unit specifications, instruments of assessment and exemplar materials across the many SVQ awards that were reviewed this session.

Evidence Requirements

Most of the centres reviewed this year have delivered SVQ awards for several years. It is quite evident that the majority of staff in those centres have wide knowledge and experience of the awards and an associated clear understanding of the Evidence Requirements.

It is typical in all centres that new assessors are mentored and experience the full internal verification process throughout their first year of delivery.

Administration of assessments

Each centre demonstrated a considered and structured approach to assessment. Given the nature of the SVQ awards and the candidate profiles, assessment activity is planned and executed to suit the individual candidates. All centres have robust planning, assessment, review and feedback processes in place supplemented by standardisation and internal verification activities.

As most assessment activity takes place on active construction sites, there is considerable awareness of the health and safety implications of these activities.

Most centres operate a regular monthly review of candidate progress, which includes assessment planning, guidance and support. However, all centres also employ flexibility, whereby candidates can negotiate directly with assessors to facilitate additional assessment opportunities.

External Verifiers reported increasing occurrence of CD and DVD recordings of professional discussions and observations of activities in portfolio presentations. In some cases, there were full transcripts of the content along with clear indexing and cross-referencing of content to Outcomes.

More centres are moving towards IT-based tracking of candidate progress.

General feedback

Feedback to candidates generally, was very good and well documented in the portfolios. Most assessors use centre-devised documentation to record feedback, discussions and forward planning objectives in preparation for the next meeting or assessment opportunity.

Candidates, almost without exception, highly praised the professionalism of their assessors and commended the support and guidance offered by them. Many spoke of the accessibility and the flexibility of their assessors in the delivery of the elements of the awards.

Areas of good practice

It is inevitable that elements of good practice observed in some centres may be seen as challenges in others. However, generally there was considerable good practice observed by External Verifiers as follows:

- ◆ Feedback to candidates is of high quality, valid and well documented.
- ◆ Centre-devised documentation that facilitates delivery and assessment is of a high standard.
- ◆ The recording of professional discussions on CD and/or DVD is highly effective and provides a permanent, contemporary record of activity.
- ◆ Several centres have developed or adopted IT-based tracking of candidate progress through the awards.
- ◆ Consideration is being given by some centres to the development of an e-portfolio system.
- ◆ Many centres have refined their evidence cross-referencing and indexing systems to make them more effective and transparent.
- ◆ Generally, internal verification activities are reported as robust and effective.

Specific areas for improvement

As noted earlier, strengths observed in some centres occur as challenges in others:

- ◆ In a very small minority of centres feedback to candidates is not managed well and is not effectively recorded.
- ◆ Cross-referencing and indexing of evidence in some instances was unclear and ineffective in linking evidence to standards.
- ◆ In a small number of instances candidate support and guidance was ineffective resulting in inadequate progress by the candidates.