Higher National Qualifications
Internal Assessment Report 2014
Business: Graded Units

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

Higher National Graded Units

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

General comments

As in 2012–13, centres have continued to face significant changes as a result of regionalisation. Many centres have now merged and new staffing structures put in place. The integration of systems is ongoing and at varying stages of completion and the impact of the changes is likely to take time to dissipate. SQA's new approach to quality assurance has, to a large extent, now bedded in with those centres still utilising the EV8a being moved to the new system in the near future. In general, those centres using the new approach to quality assurance have adapted well to evidencing the criteria.

All centres selected for qualification verification this year were familiar with the Graded Units, and most had delivered the newer versions prior to this year. The transition from the old Units to the new seems to have been relatively smooth, with centres having identified the requirements associated with the new Graded Units.

Unit specifications, instruments of assessment and exemplification materials

Qualification verification was modest this session and covered both the examination and the project. Whilst assessors and centres have attained a degree of confidence in the delivery and assessment of the Graded Units, it is critical that time needs to be spent by staff to ensure they are refreshed regarding the standards required. It is very important that the correct and most up-to-date specification and assessment are being used. One of the ASPs for Graded Unit 1 has received a number of revisions, and the specifications have changes made on a fairly regular basis. It is essential that predelivery checks are made and should be routine with the operation of the internal verification system. This is equally applicable to all other HN Units.

The centres have used the SQA assessment exemplars. Whilst the majority of Business: Graded Unit 1 provision was successful there were cases where problems with marking were identified. One situation involved the allocation of block marks which, with the very rare exception of a diagram where a block mark is specified in the marking scheme, is not appropriate. Continuing care needs to be taken to ensure that the examination is marked in line with the guidance provided in past internal assessment reports. The Units are challenging and centres must continue to ensure that all staff, and in particular those new to SQA qualifications, are given suitable information, guidance and support.

Evidence Requirements

Centres, in general, have a clear understanding of the Evidence Requirements in each of the Units, but again have to refresh themselves by referring to the Unit specifications on a regular basis. Care needs to be taken in the examination to ensure that marks are being awarded for evaluation, analysis, etc rather than for describing. At SCQF level 7 there are few, if any, marks for simple identification, which in effect takes place when a candidate describes events often repeating sections of the case study.

As in previous years, centres need to ensure that staff who are new to the Units are given appropriate support. In the projects, it is important that centres ensure that all of the requirements of the project are met. Whilst the structure of the developing stage has a degree of flexibility, the planning and evaluating stages are more rigid due to the requirements set in the marking scheme.

Administration of assessments

All centres are reported as organising and assessing candidates in accordance with the requirements set out in the Unit specifications. As in previous years, centres need to maintain a check to ensure the authenticity of project work and oral checks may help in this area. Centres are now commonly using plagiarism software as part of their authentication process and this is becoming increasingly common for other Units where out-of-class work is now more common. The continuing security of the examination assessments, as well as those for other Units, continues to be a priority in safeguarding the integrity of the awards.

General feedback

In the project, Graded Unit feedback to candidates from assessors is valuable in helping candidates identify and understand their strengths and weaknesses. Some centres provided excellent guidance that would, undoubtedly, prove very helpful in helping candidates to identify their strengths and weaknesses. Providing feedback can be time consuming and centres are finding new and innovative ways in communicating with their candidates. The use of plagiarism software to provide feedback is growing, but other means such as voice recordings have also been utilised.

Areas of good practice

Staff are, in the main, largely familiar with the requirements and standards of the Graded Units. Centres will continue to devise examples of good practice, and existing good practice will be adopted and be assimilated into standard practice. The two main areas in which good practice is often found are feedback and referencing. Both are critical to candidates and can take different forms but, essentially, the centres that provide good timely feedback in an easy to understand manner are often those that have the greatest success. Whilst formal referencing is not a specific requirement of the project, the active encouragement to adopt a recognised formal referencing system undoubtedly assists candidates in the completion of their project and if they continue into further study. Some centres utilise the Unit Research Skills to help candidates develop skills that can

be utilised in their projects. Whilst this is not a pre-requisite, it does appear to have a positive impact on results.

Specific areas for improvement

The topic selected for the project continues to be an area that can be problematic. Instances of candidates selecting very broad topics that do not relate to a specific organisation (or group of organisations), continues to be a concern. Projects that fail to make links to subjects and concepts studied in the core Units in the course also continue to be an area of weakness in some instances. A further issue is the standard of presentation which can vary significantly and centres need to continue to emphasise the importance of good presentation and that it is an essential skill in employment. Centres need to be vigilant in ensuring that the overall grade awarded to a project matches the overall performance of the candidate. There has to be some reflection on the project after all three stages are completed, and reference to the A and C grade table in the specification or ASP is advised. Formal referencing and citations are a further area where encouragement needs to be maintained.

In the examinations, centres need to remain vigilant regarding marking. Candidates are taking an SCQF level 7 examination that demands evaluation, analysis, appraisal, etc and plain description is unlikely to gain marks.

As in past years, the security of all assessments continues to be of prime importance and continued vigilance and effort is essential from all centres and staff.