Higher National Qualifications 2011
Internal Assessment Report
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

Titles/levels of HN Graded Units verified

F8LD 34 Business: Graded Unit 1 (SCQF level 7)
DE3V 35 Business: Group Award Graded Unit 2 (SCQF level 8)
DE3W 35 Business: Group Award Graded Unit 3 (SCQF level 8)

General comments

The main focus this academic session was on the new (2010) Business Graded Unit 1, F8LD 34, which a number of centres were offering for the first time. In addition a small number of centres were verified centrally for Business Graded Unit 3 (from the 2004 Business framework) as part of the ongoing periodic external verification process. Visits were made to centres as in previous years for Business Graded Unit 2 from the 2004 Business framework).

External verification was very successful with the vast majority of submissions being accepted. There would appear to be widespread understanding by centres of the requirements, demands and standards attached to each of the Graded Units. However, there are some cautionary notes further on in this report.

Unit specifications, instruments of assessment and exemplification materials

Assessors who have delivered the Graded Units from the 2004 framework are familiar with the Unit specifications and the SQA-produced assessment exemplars. The transition to the new Business Graded Unit 1 has, as a result, tended to be relatively seamless.

Evidence Requirements

The assessors in general have a good appreciation of what is required and how the Graded Units are to be delivered. However, a cautionary note should be sounded in terms of marking. There was a slight erring towards generous marking in the A and B grades at some centres. It is vital that marks are awarded for genuine points that are explained/analysed/discussed etc. It is not sufficient to merely identify points and gain marks without relevant explanations in support of the points identified. In some cases there was a degree of inconsistency possibly due to different markers being involved, or perhaps due to becoming too comfortable with the examination-based Graded Units. It is advised that prior to marking that a markers' meeting takes place to refresh the memories of those involved in relation to marking requirements and to enhance consistency.

Administration of assessments

Most of the centres are now 'old hands' at delivering the Graded Units. The Units still pose a significant challenge for the centres and candidates alike, but they are now an established part of HN awards. New centres do find the Units particularly challenging, but again the norm is that once through the first year things start to settle.

There are still differing approaches on how to prepare candidates for the examination-based Graded Units. Most centres work on technique through the use of practice questions based on practice case studies. It may seem obvious but centres must not use any of the examination assessment exemplars produced by SQA as a practice, as these are live

assessments that will be in use by other centres. Centres should also be guided away from basing practice questions on the actual case study that will be used for the examination. There is a real danger that candidates can be led towards identifying the actual examination questions, resulting in a fairly uniform set of responses. Coaching towards the actual questions is not permitted and is likely to constitute malpractice, which can lead to severe consequences for a centre and staff involved.

In the project-based Graded Unit the main comments from verification visits related to difficulties in selecting a topic, and timely submission of the three project sections. Centres will undoubtedly have to continue to give appropriate guidance regarding the selection of suitable topics for the project. It is probably fair to say that in the new Graded Unit the removal of the criteria component from the brief/plan stage may help clarify what the candidates have to do. It is vital that centres maintain tight control over the project, particularly now the credit value of the new Graded Unit has been increased from one credit to two credits. The requirement that candidates maintain an ongoing record/log of their progress may help centres keep candidates to the timescales they set.

Further general feedback

Feedback for the projects was very good, with lots of guidance that would be helpful for candidates. Centres need to continue to clearly identify marks on the examination scripts, and to identify marks for each component in the project. It is particularly important in the project to identify the criteria that have been met for the awarding of marks above the minimum required.

Candidates in general found all of the Graded Units a challenge, with no real preference between examinations versus a project. No access issues were identified during verification.

Areas of good practice

Much of what had been identified as good practice in previous reports has now become almost the norm. Whilst clearly identifying marks on exam scripts is essential, double-marking remains good practice and has been commonly adopted. Commenting where a mark might be border-line is very helpful and adds a degree of transparency. Similarly, where markers have disagreed over marks, some note as to how the differences were resolved is very useful. These practices are now widely adopted.

Specific areas for improvement

Three issues were identified during the verification process. Firstly, the verification team noted that in the higher grades in some instances there was a slight slip towards awarding marginally higher marks than merited. Centres must be careful to keep a careful eye on this in future, to avoid candidate results creeping into a higher grade than deserved.

Secondly, some centres review the marked scripts with candidates as part of the feedback process. It is not a normal practice in education to allow candidates to review formal examination scripts that have been marked, and there are real security issues as the assessment exemplar will remain a live assessment. For candidates who have not achieved a successful result in the examination, feedback based on their responses is very valuable but has to be carefully managed. For candidates who have achieved an A, B or C grade there is a danger that reviewing scripts will generate disputes between candidates, and also between candidates and assessors, regarding the marks awarded. For example, candidates will question why marks have not been awarded, and will be quick to challenge assessors.

As a result, allowing successful candidates to review their scripts is best avoided and feedback without access to their responses is more appropriate. It is also advisable that centres feedback grades for successful candidates rather than specific marks, as candidates will be given a grade upon certification and not a mark. This is more of a cautionary note rather than an area for improvement.

The third and final point relates to project submissions and again is more of a cautionary note. It is important that centres maintain control over submission dates for each of the stages of the project. Some centres reported this as a growing problem and consequently care needs to be taken to ensure that control over deadlines is met.