Higher National Qualifications
Internal Assessment Report 2013
Business Graded Unit

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 at SCQF level 7
F8LE 35 Business: Graded Unit 2 at SCQF level 8

General comments

Centres have faced significant changes this academic session with regionalisation progressing at a pace. Staffing profiles are being transformed, systems are being integrated, management structures are being radically overhauled, and functional areas are merging. The impact will be felt well into the future. The continuing development and rolling implementation of SQA's new approach to quality assurance (QA) has added a further element of change. Those centres concerned with the new approach to QA have adapted well to evidencing the criteria.

For some centres both Graded Units were new, whilst for most involved in external/qualification verification, it was the first time that the new project-based Unit had been delivered. All centres passed successfully through central and visiting verification which evidenced a good understanding of the requirements of the new Graded Units. The smooth transition from the old Graded Units to the new is testimony to the experience and confidence gained over the past years.

Unit specifications, instruments of assessment and exemplification materials

The success at external verification events indicates that assessors and centres have attained a degree of confidence that can only come with experience. Centres were familiar with the Unit specifications, the exemplars and the associated standards, but must maintain their efforts not to become complacent.

The centres have used the SQA-produced assessment exemplars. The staff involved in the delivery of the Business: Graded Unit 1 appropriately judged the requirements and standard required. In meeting staff during visits, it was clear that staff were, on the whole, comfortable with the delivery of the project-based Unit. Centres will have to continue to ensure that all staff and in particular those new to SQA qualifications are given suitable information, guidance and support.

Evidence Requirements

Centres have a clear understanding of the Evidence Requirements in each of the Units, but again have to refresh their knowledge by referring to the Unit specifications on a regular basis. Where staff or centres are new it can be difficult to judge the standard required, but most centres had delivered the previous versions of the Units and this experience was invaluable. External verification identified positive feedback from learners about the level of support and guidance that centres provide. There were also comments regarding discussions that took

place in internal verification meetings, which is very important and is to be encouraged.

Administration of assessments

All centres are reported as organising and assessing candidates in accordance with the requirements set out in the Unit specifications. Centres need to maintain a check to ensure the authenticity of project work and oral checks may help in this area. One centre used plagiarism software as part of the authentication process, and this is becoming increasingly common for other Units where out-of-class work is now more common. The continuing security of SQA-produced assessment exemplars and in particular the examinations, is crucial 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 were cited for the level of feedback and guidance that they provided candidates. Feedback can be time consuming, but good feedback is very valuable and centres are encouraged to work towards greater emphasis on this important means of communication in future.

Areas of good practice

The current format of the HNC/D Business is now well understood by centres and staff, who are in the main largely familiar with the requirements and standards of the Graded Units. As the new Units and awards become further established good practice has in many cases become, in effect, standard practice. In the future, it is likely that more innovative ideas and exceptional examples will be highlighted as good practice. That does not mean to say that where normal practice is implemented in a particularly good manner that it will be discounted. For example, feedback is normal practice, but staff were often cited as giving excellent feedback beyond what might be expected, which is very valuable for candidates, and can be very time consuming. There were also examples where staff provided individual tutorials to students undertaking a project, again time consuming, although much depends upon the resourcing available, number of candidates etc. Some centres ran the project management element of the Unit: Information and Communication Technology in Business at a point in the course that enables learners to use it in the planning stage of the project. Other centres integrated alternative Units such as Research Skills and Personal Development Planning with the project, allowing for learning in one Unit to complement and enhance performance in the other.

Specific areas for improvement

It is difficult to be entirely objective on the basis of the verification reports, but with the benefit of discussions with staff one potential danger in the project-based Unit involves the topic selected. It is easy to slip into allowing candidates to undertake very general broad business projects, which whilst interesting lack a

focus on an issue relating to one or a group of businesses. A further issue can be weakness in learners linking their project to specific areas, topics or theories in the mandatory section of the course. Often candidates will make a tenuous mention of Units, but fail to grasp that the project seeks stronger connections to be made. Whilst it is not a mandatory requirement, the use of formal referencing and citations is an area where encouragement needs to be maintained.

Often areas for improvement are more about maintaining current efforts. For example, continuing to make checks on plagiarism in projects is, in effect, a never ending task which requires to be undertaken each year. The security of all assessments, but in particular the examination Graded Units continues to be of prime importance and continued vigilance and effort is essential from all centres and staff.