



**Higher National Qualifications
Internal Assessment Report 2015
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

Business: Graded Unit 1 - F8LD 34 - SCQF level 7

Business: Graded Unit 2 - F8LE 35 - SCQF level 8

General comments

Centres have continued to face significant changes this academic session in the aftermath of regionalisation. Staffing continues to change and often staff are new to Graded Units and are now delivering and assessing both the examination and the project. Centres are continuing to adapt to their changed circumstances and the adoption of uniform systems in merged centres poses an ongoing challenge. In the past year there has been little change in the approach to quality assurance used by SQA, and centres have made significant progress in adapting to the requirements of the current criterion-based approach.

Centres have a firm grasp of the standards expected in the examination and the project, and have successfully matched the requirements of these Units against SCQF level 7 and 8 respectively. For new staff, the delivery of the Business Graded Units poses a challenge that requires the support of the centre and staff experienced in their delivery.

Unit specifications, instruments of assessment and exemplification materials

The success at external verification events indicates that assessors and internal verifiers have attained a degree of confidence in the delivery and assessment of both the examination and project-based Graded Units. Graded Units have now been in place for the past decade and were updated in 2010, and staff have adapted well to the demands of these Units and the changes that were made. Centres were familiar with the Unit specifications, the ASPs and the associated standards, but must ensure that they are using the most up-to-date versions as periodic revisions are made.

The centres have used the SQA ASPs and a further ASP for the examination has been added for this academic session. The staff involved in the delivery of the Business: Graded Unit 1 appropriately judged the requirements and standard expected. In meeting staff during visits, it was clear that there was a sense that the projects are now firmly embedded within the Group Award. Centres will have to continue to ensure that all staff, and in particular those new to the Business Graded Units, 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 it is important that they refresh themselves by referring to the Unit specifications on a regular basis. It is also important to be familiar with each ASP being used, and standardisation meetings should play a crucial part in

ensuring quality assurance. Many centres are adopting the use of markers' meetings to discuss the assessments and to try to ensure that the correct standards are identified and applied across different sites. This last point is critical with the advent of the mergers over recent years. It is not uncommon for different staff in different sites to be delivering the Graded Units, and regular contact and discussion is essential to help avoid variances in interpretation.

The use of standardisation records, which record comments regarding discussions that took place in internal verification meetings, 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. Some centres use anti-plagiarism software or checkers as part of the authentication process and this is becoming increasingly common for other Units where out-of-class work is common. There has been a move towards typed responses in the examination at some centres. There needs to be appropriate security in place to disable the opportunity for engagement with any external data, but also to ensure that tools such as a thesaurus and spell-check are also disabled. Centres need to ensure that candidates are not able to retain an electronic copy of their work from which the questions could later be derived.

The continuing security of assessments, 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. This is also important for the examination where a candidate has not attained the 50% achievement threshold. Centres in general provide valuable feedback for the projects, and for the examination when required.

Areas of good practice

Many experienced staff have departed from SQA centres in the past few years, but, in general, the Graded Units are well understood by the remaining staff who are familiar with their requirements and standards. Good practice continues to be identified and one such example is the growing use of authenticity checkers in open-book work, including the project. In many cases centres use electronic submission which provides greater control over submissions. There is also an increasing use of feedback being provided in electronic format.

There has been a greater recording of meetings showing how papers are to be marked, how differences between markers are overcome, and how to ascertain the standards associated with these Units. Whilst standardisation and internal verification are a mandatory requirement of the quality assurance process, there

has been a genuine development in the way that these meetings are being used to ensure that appropriate standards are identified and adopted more consistently.

More centres have adopted the HN Unit Research Skills to help candidates produce stronger projects. This has been aided through the production of a common checklist as part of the HN Enhancements Project that allows for integrated assessment for the project and the Research Skills Unit.

Specific areas for improvement

An area that requires continuing vigilance and action is in the marking of the examination. In some instances it was not clear as to how the marks had been gained, possibly due to staff being new to marking the examination. Centres should adopt a conventional marking approach where individual marks are identified clearly on the candidate script. This can be achieved using brackets, or underlining a section, or by using a line in the margin against the sentence where the mark is awarded. In each case a single mark would also be identified in the margin against the sentence identified as deserving a mark. There should be a distinction between a basic content mark and one awarded for development, and it is common for the use of '1c' or '1d' to be used to distinguish the types of mark awarded.

Block marks should be avoided unless it is specified in a suggested response for a diagram. Simply placing a total block mark for a response or section of a response without showing the individual marks gained would not be acceptable. Whilst a tick can be used to indicate where a mark is gained, ticks are best avoided and the conventions previously mentioned are more helpful in identifying precisely where each individual mark is gained. Similarly, the use of random ticks which do not match the marks awarded must be avoided. Also half marks are not permitted.

As in previous years, staff need to continue to be alert to the potential danger of allowing candidates to undertake very general broad business projects. This can be difficult to avoid as candidates often find it hard to select a suitable topic that has a specific focus within one or more organisations. These broad general projects tend to lack a focus and often result in general subjective conclusions and recommendations which in turn impacts on the grade achieved.

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.