



**Higher National Qualifications
Internal Assessment Report 2014
Construction Engineering**

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.

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.

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 candidate's 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:

- ◆ Internal verification and standardisation were not consistent over all campuses.

Higher National Graded Units

Titles/levels of HN Graded Units verified:

F03N 34 Civil Engineering Graded Unit 1 (HNC)

F08H 35 Civil Engineering Graded Unit 2 (HND)

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.

Many centres select subjects for the Graded unit projects which are highly topical and particularly relevant to the local area.

Unit specifications, instruments of assessment and exemplification materials

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.

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.

In one centre it was noted however, that there was occasionally, a lack of formalised control and supervision in the respect of the use of digitised files with a number of drawings being similar within candidates' portfolios. It was recommended that a more robust quality assurance structure be devised to ensure authenticity of candidates' work when producing technical drawings in .dwg or other digitised formats or when working with digital information.

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.

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

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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:

- ◆ Standardisation and internal verification processes were not consistent over all campuses.
- ◆ The quality (and quantity) of referencing within candidates' bibliographies is highly variable.
- ◆ QA processes to ensure authenticity when candidates use digitised file formats for drawings and data.