



**Higher National Qualifications  
Internal Assessment Report 2015  
Construction Engineering**

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

# Higher National Units

## General comments

Throughout the sector, it is very clear that all centres have a thorough, clear and accurate understanding of the requirements of the national standards relating to the current Built Environment suite of HN qualifications.

The entire suite of HN qualifications has been subjected to a major review and these updated qualifications became 'live' in August 2014. A very small number of centres initiated delivery of these new programmes in the 2014–15 academic session. Again, the staff in this small cohort of centres demonstrated a clear and accurate understanding of national standards and their implications for these awards.

One recently-approved international centre has had difficulty in achieving the agreed national standards and development initiatives have been instigated to remedy their performance.

## Unit specifications, instruments of assessment and exemplification materials

The legacy of the past nine years of delivery of the Built Environment HN awards is that all staff are thoroughly familiar with the complete suite of Unit specifications, instruments of assessment and SQA-derived exemplar materials. Over this term, most centres have produced a comprehensive catalogue of alternate instruments of assessment which, more than adequately meet the requirements of the Unit specifications.

The wealth of knowledge among the assessors and internal verifiers in the centres has informed the recent review and introduction of the updated HN qualifications and all associated Unit specifications and assessment support packs (ASPs). External verification activity in the minority of centres delivering the new awards has confirmed that the staff are completely familiar with the structure, content and principles of the Unit specifications and ASPs.

An exception to the above comments was identified in the recently-approved international centre where, because of a high turnover of staff, assessors and internal verifiers were not fully familiar with Unit specifications and other SQA materials and processes.

## Evidence Requirements

It is apparent from the external verification activities this session, that there is a clear and comprehensive understanding of the Evidence Requirements as laid out in the Unit specifications.

As noted earlier, the single exception was a recently-approved international centre that did not demonstrate a complete understanding of Evidence

Requirements in Unit specifications. Development initiatives are on-going to remedy the situation.

### **Administration of assessments**

'Regionalisation' is still impacting on a few centres as they cope with the integration of a variety of quality systems that were present in their constituent campuses. However, all centres have presented, at external verification, robust systems that ably support the delivery of all aspects of the Built Environment HN programmes.

Many centres are continuing development of 'learner/information portals' to aid and enhance the delivery of all qualifications. These give access to all elements and documentation that support delivery, learning, tutorial, guidance, assessment and verification activities. Accessibility for candidates is controlled through enrolment, but the facilities reinforce the learner-tutor relationship.

Most centres continue to support and attend the Built Environment Qualifications Support Team (QST). Through this forum, all centres benefit from the sharing of good practice and the critical review of the updated HN programmes as they are introduced and embedded across the sector.

The majority of centres, using SQA exemplar materials as their basis, have developed a wide array of alternate instruments of assessment. In all cases these have been found to be extremely robust, valid and appropriate.

The recently-approved international centre has been slow to embrace SQA philosophies in delivery and management of these qualifications. As a result, assessment and internal verification processes lacked the rigour demanded by SQA. Resolution of these issues is on-going.

### **General feedback**

Almost without exception, feedback to candidates has been excellent. A balance must be struck with feedback on Unit submissions so that the individual expression is preserved and not overly diminished by a surfeit of tutor input. Tutor guidance has invariably been relevant, informative and supportive and has given candidates scope for interpretation to suit their individual submissions.

More centres/tutors are using e-mail or recently-developed information portals to issue and record feedback on assessment submissions. These forms of communication are also used to enhance accessibility to tutors and candidates and the management of the assessment process.

Generally, feedback from candidates once again, has commended the sheer professionalism, support and guidance offered by tutors and support staff throughout their educational endeavours. Many spoke of the accessibility of tutors, even outwith programmed class and tutorial activities. There was considerable praise for the electronic forms of communication, especially the new learning portals that have been introduced.

No barriers to assessment were observed, but some comments on assessment burden were received. Wherever possible, most centres had clearly planned assessment activity to avoid conflict and offered some flexibility of assessment activity. In addition, integration of assessment was observed in some centres.

### **Areas of good practice**

The most significant example of good practice recorded this session was the introduction and onward development in many centres of learning/ information portals through which the many aspects of programme delivery are managed.

Several other examples of good practice were also recorded as follows:

- ◆ Regular programme meetings with staff and class representatives
- ◆ EV reports held on information portal, accessible to all staff
- ◆ Feedback to learners — relevant, informative and supportive
- ◆ Structure and content of master folders were exemplary
- ◆ Design of alternate instruments of assessment were innovative, topical and related to known development proposals
- ◆ Candidate support has been commended almost without exception across the sector
- ◆ Accessibility of tutors/assessors outwith programmed class and tutorial sessions

### **Specific areas for improvement**

A few issues were identified in a very small minority of centres as follows:

- ◆ Lack of consistency in reporting and recording of feedback to learners
- ◆ Lack of consistency in assessors' judgements
- ◆ Standardisation activities not recorded and documentation not available for audit purposes
- ◆ Internal verification process irregular and ineffective

# Higher National Graded Units

Titles/levels of HN Graded Units verified:

F03N 34 HNC Civil Engineering Graded Unit 1  
F08H 35 HND Civil Engineering Graded Unit 2  
H73Y 34 HNC Civil Engineering Graded Unit 1

## General comments

It is quite clear that all centres have a complete and comprehensive understanding of the requirements of the national standards. There is considerable evidence across centres in the structure and design of instruments of assessment, marking schemes and, in particular, the content of the candidates' portfolios that national standards are being observed and maintained.

The exception to the above comments was identified in the recently-approved international centre where, because of a high turnover of staff, assessors and internal verifiers were not fully familiar with Unit specifications and other SQA materials and processes. As a result, national standards were not observed. Development initiatives are in place and are on-going in order to remedy the deficiencies.

## Unit specifications, instruments of assessment and exemplification materials

Since Graded Units were introduced into the Built Environment suite in 2006, a considerable wealth of expertise has been developed by assessors across the entire sector. All current assessors are thoroughly familiar with Graded Unit specifications and the associated SQA exemplar materials. This is clearly apparent in the number and variety of alternate instruments of assessment that have been produced by the majority of centres. Many of these centre-designed instruments of assessment are based on the skeleton of SQA exemplar materials, but relate directly to local 'live' or viable construction proposals.

All of these alternative assessment materials have either been subjected to prior verification process or external verification review thereby ensuring standards are being maintained.

As noted earlier, assessors and internal verifiers in a recently-approved international centre lacked familiarity with the Graded Unit specifications. As a result, delivery of the subject area was inadequate and candidate submissions did not meet the required standards. Resolution of these issues is on-going.

## Evidence Requirements

It is apparent from the quality of presentation observed in candidates' portfolios (and in centres' graduation shows), that all assessors and internal verifiers have

a clear and thorough understanding of Evidence Requirements laid out in the Graded Unit specifications.

The one exception to these comments has already been reported.

### **Administration of assessments**

'Regionalisation' is still impacting on a few centres as they cope with the integration of a variety of quality systems that were present in their constituent campuses. However, all centres have presented, at external verification, robust systems that ably support the delivery of all aspects of the Built Environment HN programmes.

Many centres are continuing development of 'learner/information portals' to aid and enhance the delivery of all qualifications. These give access to all elements and documentation that support delivery, learning, tutorial, guidance, assessment and verification activities. Accessibility for candidates is controlled through enrolment, but the facilities reinforce the learner-tutor relationship.

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- ◆ Feedback to learners — relevant, informative and supportive
- ◆ Structure and content of master folders were exemplary
- ◆ Design of Graded Unit instruments of assessment were innovative, topical and relevant to local community
- ◆ Double/cross-marking of learner submissions
- ◆ Harvard referencing adopted as 'industry standard' for learner submissions
- ◆ Candidate support has been commended almost without exception across the sector
- ◆ Accessibility of tutors/ assessors outwith programmed class and tutorial sessions

## **Specific areas for improvement**

A few issues that were considered unsatisfactory were identified in a small minority of centres as follows:

- ◆ Access to CAD facilities was restricted at crucial times which hindered efficient portfolio development
- ◆ Internal verification activity was not up to date and was unverifiable
- ◆ Assessors' judgements were inappropriate and did not meet Unit specification and Evidence Requirements