Higher National Qualifications
Internal Assessment Report 2014
Economics

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

Many centres have merged or entered into collaborative arrangements over the past two years, leading to a very different educational landscape. Staffing has changed with many centres losing some of their more experienced lecturers and managers, whilst at the same time significant alterations to managerial structures are being formed. It is a testament to those involved in the delivery and assessment of Units within verification group 258 that qualification verification has been so successful this academic session. Whilst for many, SQA's new approach to quality assurance is no longer so new, for some it was their first encounter with the risk-based assessment system. Again, this has posed a further challenge which, on the whole, centres have taken in their stride.

The larger centres now have significant numbers of candidates often across different groups and several awards. In the majority of instances, centres have been verified under their old names rather than in their new unified combined form. Once centres are verified as a single entity, standardisation will become a more challenging requirement. Many centres will operate in an environment comprising multiple sites, with different staff delivering and assessing the same Unit to multiple groups. Qualification verification confirmed that there was evidence of a good understanding of the requirements of the Units and SQA awards.

Unit specifications, instruments of assessment and exemplification materials

The success at qualification verification events supports the view that assessors and centres are familiar with the Unit specifications, the exemplars and the associated standards.

A weakness that was identified was the lack of checking whether the Unit specifications and exemplar/ASPs were the most up-to-date versions. SQA regularly updates both specifications and ASPs and internal verification should pick these changes up at the predelivery stage. Whilst records indicate a check has been made, evidence suggests that this was not always the case and old paper copies have been handed on from one year to the next with changes missed. All changes are made for a reason and some might be minor but the changes can be highly significant and substantial. If updates are missed at the predelivery stage, there could be significant consequences regarding the outcome of qualification verification with a potential impact on certification. The risk of this error is likely to increase as centres merge systems and operate out of different sites with different staff. Effective operation of the internal verification system is crucial in helping to eliminate this potential hazard.

From discussions with staff during verification visits, they appeared to be comfortable with the delivery of the Units, although there were discussions about the assessment load. The staff were made aware of the possibility of utilising the

new reduced assessment approach for the Unit F7J8 34 — Economic Issues: An Introduction, which has recently developed by SQA for piloting in 2014–15. The Alternative Assessment Approach Support Pack is available for centres participating in the *Piloting 'Enhancements' to Support Articulation* project.

As indicated in the guidance last year, it is particularly important that centres continue to ensure that all staff, especially new staff, are given suitable information, guidance and support.

Evidence Requirements

Centres and staff had a clear understanding of the Evidence Requirements in each of the Units that were selected for qualification verification. Again, it is important to stress the need for staff to refer to the Unit specifications on a regular basis and ensure that the most up-to-date version is being used. Where staff or centres are new, it can be difficult to judge the standard required but most centres have an established track record in delivery of Units in verification group 258. The Units continue to be challenging, but feedback from learners indicated an appreciation of the importance of their content.

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. Centres are increasingly using originality checkers as part of the authentication process. In addition, the use of signed authenticity sheets is now common practice and centres have focused well on an issue that is likely to continue to be a problem in education as a whole. Centres are now often using electronic feedback through VLEs such as Blackboard in addition to running originality checks. The security of assessments is of continuing importance in safeguarding the integrity of the Units and the awards.

General feedback

The verification reports and discussions with candidates indicate that there were excellent examples of feedback being given to candidates from assessors. Many centres are providing electronic feedback through a VLE or other means. There has been a move towards feeding-forward where assessors provide guidance on how learners might improve, in addition to giving feedback on the learners' current performance. This is particularly 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 to candidates, which can be particularly time consuming — but good feedback is very valuable and centres are encouraged to continue with their efforts on this important means of communication.

Areas of good practice

The main area where centres were cited under the good practice section was for the level and quality of feedback provided. As mentioned above, this is valuable in helping learners assess their current ability but also allows them to see how they might improve.

Additional good practice related to the use of originality checkers and the extension into providing feedback in an electronic format. In some instances, feedback was in audio format. Care needs to be exercised in the use of originality checkers in how they are set up, but with consideration they can prove to be a powerful tool and can be used in a positive manner.

Electronic submission comes with other advantages in that it makes submission dates and times transparent, and these are recorded. This has been a problem in many centres and one that can be significantly alleviated using an electronic submission system.

Specific areas for improvement

The main area for improvement is checking that the most up-to-date specification and ASP is being used or that a locally devised assessment has been updated accordingly. This is a concern because changes can be significant and missing these changes highlights that internal verification is not effective. This is a critical consideration because the co-ordination of multiple sites and staff brings even more challenges to ensuring that standards are correctly interpreted and applied.

As in previous years, the security of all assessments continues to be of prime importance and continued vigilance and effort is essential from all centres and staff. Overall, the centres and staff are doing an excellent job but focus needs to be maintained to ensure that this continues.