



Higher National Qualifications Internal Assessment Report 2016 Economics

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

Major Scottish centres are now in a post-merger period and the significant changes that have taken place over the past few years seem to be settling down. A number of new centres and international centres have started to deliver SQA awards that include units from the Economics group. Many Scottish centres now deliver units at different sites and this will continue to pose challenges with regard to standardisation, but it was noted that there has been a greater focus from centres to address this important need and it is starting to have a positive impact.

The units within the economics verification group have been in existence for a significant period of time having been periodically revised. The established centres are, in the main, familiar with their requirements and the standards associated with each of them at SCQF levels 7 and 8. New centres still find the units a challenge when offering them for the first time, and continuing investment in time and effort is required to firmly establish the requirements set by SQA.

For a second year the HN Enhancement Project has run successfully for Economic Issues: An Introduction F7J8 34, where the assessment has been reduced to a single one and a half hour examination with a cut-off score of 50%. The pilot aims to better align assessment of SQA HND qualifications with the demands of university assessment. The project has now been extended for a further year and will enable Scottish centres to use the reduced assessment approach for the academic session 2016–17.

Unit specifications, instruments of assessment and exemplification materials

Qualification verification has generally been successful with a few exceptions: some new centres that are going through a period of familiarisation with the units and SQA awards. Centres should be aware that the unit specifications and assessment support packs (ASPs) will continue to be updated when required. Therefore, continuing to check each year that the correct specification and assessments are being used is essential, and this should be recorded within internal verification records.

Standardisation is an ongoing requirement which will always have to take place regardless of the experience of the staff and how successful the centre has been. It is more vital than ever, given the changes in the college landscape, that there is effective co-ordination between those delivering and assessing awards, and formalised processes and approaches to decision making when it comes to making assessment decisions.

As in previous reports it is important to stress the continuing need for staff to refer back to the unit specifications to maintain a sound basis for assessment decisions, but also to use professional judgement underpinned by discussion with

colleagues when arriving at assessment decisions. This is vital to ensure those decisions are sound and consistent.

As in years past, the centres visited in the vast majority of cases used the SQA ASPs with a good number using the reduced assessment examination for Economic Issues: An Introduction.

Evidence requirements

Centres and staff in general had a clear understanding of the evidence requirements in each of the units that were externally verified. The exceptions tended to be in new centres delivering for the first time where it can take a period of bedding-in for staff to gauge the requirements and standard of the work expected. In the case of the examination, centres visited had correctly judged the standard of work required to achieve the pass mark of 50%. The feeling from discussions at verification events was that the examination was a popular assessment approach for staff, but also that it helped candidates with examination techniques which they could use to good effect later in their course.

Even where staff are experienced there is an ongoing need for standardisation meetings to ensure that there is a continuing appreciation of the evidence requirements across sites and to help ensure that decisions being made are consistent.

Administration of assessments

The majority of centres organised and assessed candidates in accordance with the requirements set out in the unit specifications. A small number struggled to interpret the standard required and some failed to fully understand the requirements set out within some of the unit specifications.

The authenticity of candidate evidence continues to be a challenge. Most centres maintained checks to ensure the authenticity of work undertaken. It was almost universal that declaration sheets were used and a growing number of centres are using electronic authenticity checks. Provided that these mechanisms are used appropriately they can be an excellent means of reducing instances of plagiarism. Several centres were now using the electronic authenticity software to provide feedback to candidates, and also to encourage greater attention from candidates with regard to submission dates. The continuing security of assessments is of continuing importance in safeguarding the integrity of the units and the awards, and centres and staff have an ongoing duty to minimise the risk of assessment security being compromised.

General feedback

Most centres provided excellent feedback to candidates. This was increasingly being provided electronically through the use of electronic mechanisms. In addition candidates often had the opportunity to gain verbal feedback from assessors. Feedback is valuable in helping candidates identify and understand their strengths and weaknesses, allowing them to improve in the future. Providing feedback can be very time consuming and centres generally invested heavily in

it, and this was reflected in the findings from qualification verification which identified positive comments from learners about the level of support and guidance they received.

Areas of good practice

A number of areas/examples of good practice were identified during the course of this year's verification activity. Often an example was found in more than one centre and the areas included:

- ◆ The use of authenticity checkers
- ◆ The provision of feedback in electronic format
- ◆ The use of electronic submission to ensure deadlines are met
- ◆ Exceptional student support outside classes
- ◆ Electronic guidance systems being used to record performance, attendance, allowing for the early identification of problems and appropriate tailored support
- ◆ Electronic master folders/SharePoint and other electronic portals, allowing for access across sites to materials, records, assessments etc.
- ◆ A greater focus on holding (and recording) standardisation meetings to help make sound and more consistent assessment decisions
- ◆ More examples of verification feedback being incorporated into standardisation meetings and verification records with appropriate actions where necessary

As in previous years good practice will, over time, become in effect normal practice as centres attempt to continually improve in how they support their learners.

Specific areas for improvement

Whilst the majority of verification activity had positive outcomes there were some instances where weaknesses were identified. Even in centres with significant strengths there is the potential capacity to make changes to try to improve, whether this is in assessment practice, student support or simply to introduce new technology as a means of being up-to-date. Some of the areas of weakness and areas where improvements might be made are as follows:

- ◆ Ensuring that effective and meaningful internal verification takes place as an integral part of delivery and assessment
- ◆ Recording standardisation meetings
- ◆ Better co-ordinating assessment standards when delivering in different sites by different staff
- ◆ Ensuring that staff understand the standards and assessment requirements of the units they are delivering
- ◆ Always checking each year for updates to unit specifications and assessments etc

- ◆ Fully supporting staff new to units they are delivering

In general, most centres and staff are doing an excellent job and this was further supported through the enthusiastic feedback from candidates.