



**Higher National Qualifications
Internal Assessment Report 2014
English and Communication**

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

Centres visited during the year have, in general, demonstrated clear and accurate understanding of the requirements of national standards with the majority achieving a significant-strengths rating in the maintenance of standards in all categories.

Co-operative team working has ensured that learner skills developed are relevant to needs. Where practical, the integration of research and writing tasks with other programme elements has been useful and effective, most notably in the HN Business awards.

Technology is, increasingly a valuable resource. Paperless approaches being developed in many centres support both staff and learners and are particularly efficient where there is cross-campus Unit delivery. Social media and e-mail are well used to facilitate and record excellent communication between learners and tutors.

Learners interviewed have been very positive and enthusiastic in recognising the contribution of useful transferable skills developed as preparation for progression to university and employment. The quality of communication evidence has been to a high standard.

Unit specifications, instruments of assessment and exemplification materials

Assessors seem, in general, to be fully aware of the detail of Unit specifications and most are familiar with current SQA exemplar and support materials. In many centres these packs are used as models for assessment, contextualised to local demand and/or the programmes being undertaken.

A few centres continue to use original SQA assessment exemplar packs to support and assess servicing Units. Although technically valid, materials are outdated. Where necessary, centres have been advised to update approaches and to upgrade to the newer support packs.

Alternative assessments are available to meet specific identified needs and/or lecturing staff work with Extended Learning Support (ELS) sections to tailor and create suitable assessments as appropriate.

Evidence Requirements

Evidence Requirements for HN Communication Units are clearly understood by most; work is in progress in places to train inexperienced assessors in maintaining standards. Assessment tasks selected are relevant to study programmes and designed to challenge learners at an appropriate level.

Assessments are in keeping with industry practice and often linked to, or integrated with, work across course programmes.

Some excellent examples of inter-departmental team working have been observed. These have ensured that evidence has relevance to the current requirements of the vocational area; practical integration with other research and writing has minimised the assessment burden.

Administration of assessments

Materials presented for external verification have, in the main, been very well organised, well presented and very accessible for external verification. The new approach to quality assurance has provided a framework and focus for standardisation in the critical elements of delivery.

The paperless approach being developed in many centres is efficient, particularly where there is cross-campus Unit delivery. Detailed electronic records of every aspect of assessment including master folders, draft work, tutor feedback, evidence and results have been noted. Concise Standardisation Records, which list comments on areas of potential risk or concern, have been praised, as have internal verification controls on the selection of assessments.

Centres are commended for their attention to detail in internal verification procedures and documentation.

General feedback

Learners are being well prepared and supported for assessment across all Units with many examples of good practice. Access to assessment is fair and equitable with many learners able to self-refer discreetly to an ELS section for guidance and support.

Formal feedback provided by tutors in writing continues to be encouraging and supportive in all Communication Units, with clear and precise guidance given on any further development requirements.

Learners interviewed were positive about the support provided by tutors. They particularly appreciated planned integration with other subjects to reduce their workload. Feedback on report writing was seen as useful to set the benchmark for the standard/level of written work across awards. Learners viewed the Communication Units as a sound preparation for university and the real world of employment.

Areas of good practice

Increasing use of web-based materials, social media and online support develops skills and is encouraging learner autonomy and independence.

A co-ordinated course team approach to initial personal planning and ongoing delivery supports the development of Skills for Learning, Life and Work and the perceived relevance of the programme.

Secure electronic versions of master folders to include SQA packs and any internally developed assessments — with detailed marking guides — is particularly helpful where assessors work on a range of sites. Providing samples of 'borderline' evidence, with commentary, also supports assessor judgement.

A robust plagiarism policy explained at induction and supported by effective tracking software, such as Turnitin, helps with authentication of writing and is resulting in more original research and written reports.

Specific areas for improvement

'Servicing' Units DE3N 34 and D77G 34

Assessing Reading skills

Some over-assessment has been observed in Outcome 1. Although it is valuable to teach in-depth critical analysis, it is neither necessary nor time efficient to assess all aspects of skills taught, nor is it necessary to re-assess all Core Skill competences. Centres are advised to become familiar with approaches in the most current assessment support examples.

Assessing Oral Communication skills

The detail of comment on observation checklists has been much improved but more is needed. There are still instances of a tick-box approach to oral assessment. A detailed observation checklist should be used to record achievement, with precise comments and feedback based on Evidence Requirements. A number of centres routinely record all learner meetings and discussions. Centres are reminded that assessment discussions should involve problem solving and not be a series of individual presentations. Differing practices for recording minutes and discussions within a centre may be justified but would benefit from review and discussion.

Higher National Graded Units

Titles/levels of HN Graded Units verified:

F6V7 34 Creative Industries: Media and Communication GU1

F26M 34 Creative Industries: Professional Writing Skills GU1

General comments

There has been limited external verification of the Graded Units in these two awards but portfolio assignments verified have been an interesting mix of media products, all presented to an exceptionally high standard. Both awards achieve significant strengths in the maintenance of standards in all quality categories.

The challenging task of nurturing young talent and at the same time encouraging realism and independence has been very well managed by tutors.

All the aims and purposes of both awards are being fully met, with style. Progression success rates in higher education and employment confirm the skills being developed and supported by the commitment and dedication of staff and students.

Unit specifications, instruments of assessment and exemplification materials

Assessors are completely familiar with the Unit specifications and instruments of assessment. Qualifications Development Team meetings are planned to review both awards and exemplar materials and to share experiences.

Evidence Requirements

Work produced is to industry standards with portfolios in a range of media. Work shows originality, creativity and quality.

Administration of assessments

In recognition of the importance of the grade awarded there is scrupulous attention to cross-marking. Immediate action on internal verifiers' comments is routine practice.

Paperless systems are increasingly being developed.

General feedback

Although the emphasis in portfolio building is on autonomy and independence, constructive support is being given to learners in personal development reviews at each stage of the process. Social media is used for ongoing supportive communication between all involved — as in the creative industries.

Learners interviewed have been very enthusiastic about the benefits of the course programmes and more than satisfied with support provided. They have taken ownership of their projects and have benefited from the course academically, by building on new skills and knowledge and in terms of personal growth by gaining entry to both university and employment opportunities. Their presentation skills and confidence are impressive.

Areas of good practice

Course programmes include visits and staff input from specialist media professionals and practitioners.

Public performances of original work and submission to publications are encouraged.

Use of a virtual learning environment (VLE) and electronic master folders with detailed assessments provide excellent information and support for staff and — as appropriate — learners.

Specific areas for improvement

There are no areas identified for improvement. In both awards the work being done by staff and the portfolios produced are to a very impressive industry standard.