



**Higher National Qualifications
Internal Assessment Report 2013
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

The majority of centres visited over the year have been able to demonstrate clear and accurate understanding of the requirements of national standards.

Unit specifications, instruments of assessment and exemplification materials

Assessors are, in general, aware of the detail of Unit specifications and are familiar with SQA exemplar and support materials. In many centres the most recently published examples are used as models for assessment, contextualised to the HN awards being undertaken.

There are still a few instances of assessment using outdated materials or approaches. Although these may be technically valid they do not represent best practice in the development of Communication skills for employment or progression.

Evidence Requirements

Evidence Requirements for the HN Communication Units are generally clearly understood. Tasks set are relevant and well designed to challenge candidates at an appropriate level. Assessments are contextualised and in keeping with current industry practice. Assessment where practical, is linked to, or integrated with, work across course programmes. Some good examples of inter-departmental team working have been seen.

Newer members of staff are not always as aware as they could be of recommended approaches to generating evidence. This includes the need to ensure that work submitted meets the Evidence Requirements of the Unit specification and is original.

Administration of assessments

Materials presented for external verification have been, in the main, well organised, well presented and very accessible for scrutiny. The New Approach to Quality Assurance has been useful in assuring standardisation in the checking of critical elements of delivery.

Although instances of cross-college variation in assessment instructions and checklists have been observed, the value of internal verification in addressing areas of concern has been confirmed. Centres are commended generally for their attention to detail in internal verification procedures and documentation. Clarity of feedback to assessors and specific action planning have been underpinned by a general increase in the number of assessor meetings and formal discussions recorded.

General feedback

There is evidence that candidates are being well prepared and supported for assessment across all Units with clear examples of good practice. Formal feedback provided to candidates continues to be encouraging and supportive in all centres, with clear and precise guidance given on any further development requirements.

Access to assessment is routinely fair and equitable, although inconsistencies of approach across teams of assessors occasionally include a difference in their expectation of candidates. Some assessors accept a minimal, though acceptable level of response and others challenge candidates more to develop their skills. Similarly, some candidates are being given more support than others in remedial work.

Candidates interviewed confirm the value of the Units in developing the skills and confidence needed for progression.

Areas of good practice

Increasing use of web-based materials, social media (including Facebook) and online support develops relevant skills, encourages candidate independence and keeps the subject area up to date. Use of Moodle and Mahara seems to be particularly helpful.

Teaching and assessment materials are increasingly making sensible use of current SQA support materials. Secure electronic versions of master folders to include these and any internally developed assessments — with detailed marking guides — is particularly helpful where assessors work on different sites. Providing samples of 'borderline' evidence, with commentary, will support assessor judgement.

A robust policy on plagiarism, supported by effective tracking software, is producing more original research and written reports. Plagiarism and the problems associated with copying and downloading materials directly is often explained as part of initial learning agreements and class wall posters serve as timely reminders of the need for original work.

A co-ordinated course team approach to delivery and integration with other practical Units maximises opportunities for developing skills that are relevant and important to employability. Understanding of ethics and sustainability has been consciously built into course work, ensuring the development of Skills for Learning, Life and Work.

Pre-course language classes for international students have been introduced in some centres. The ESOL Unit DE1K 33 Workplace Communication in English is included in HN award frameworks and provides useful access (at SCQF level 6) to Communication servicing Units.

Specific areas for improvement

Assessing Reading skills: Evaluation of texts should not be general but must focus on the criteria listed in the Evidence Requirements. It is not necessary or efficient to re-assess the complete Core Skill competences. Weaknesses in writing skill should not be penalised; oral responses may be more appropriate for candidates whose writing skills are still being developed.

Assessing Writing skills: There is no single format for writing a report. If business writing is integrated with other course work a range of styles will be appropriate. It is sensible to select and explain a 'house style' of writing that is appropriate to the vocational area of the award. Differing practices for recording minutes and discussions, some of which did not reflect workplace practice, have been seen within centres.

Assessing Oral Communication skills: The emphasis of meetings should be on team problem solving, and not on a series of individual presentations. Topics chosen for discussion must focus on complex vocational issues. Discussion groups should be kept to a reasonable size to allow all to contribute properly.

There are still instances of a 'tick box' approach to oral evidence, supplemented by a few vague comments on 'professionalism'. A detailed Observation checklist should be used to record achievement, with precise comments based on Evidence Requirements. Candidate preparatory notes should be retained and ideally, some oral work will be recorded for feedback to candidates and internal/external verification purposes.

Higher National Graded Units

Titles/levels of HN Graded Units verified:

F6V7 34 Creative Industries: Media and Communication GU1

General comments

There has been limited, but successful, external verification of the Graded Units this session.

Unit specifications, instruments of assessment and exemplification materials

The current Unit specification and a summary form are in use. Assessors are familiar with the revised Unit specifications and instruments of assessment. More exemplification materials for the new awards are in production and Qualifications Development Team (QDT) meetings are planned to review work to date and share experiences.

Evidence Requirements

Assessors have been supported by a practitioner External Verifier (EV) to assure a clear and accurate understanding of the Evidence Requirements and standards for the Unit.

Administration of assessments

Pre-delivery procedures could have been more rigorous for work in specialist Units of the award. Advice has been provided by SQA on the holistic nature of the Unit and need for appropriate quality checks and support.

General feedback

Detailed and constructive feedback is being given to candidates. Candidates interviewed by the EV are satisfied with the support provided. Feedback was very positive. They feel that they had 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 with increased confidence. They believe that the Graded Unit would be of benefit in gaining employment and/or progressing to university.

Areas of good practice

A teaching schedule provided to candidates at the start of the Unit delivery clearly highlights the mandatory deadlines and the allocated time available for each stage of the Graded Unit.

Well-organised master folders with detailed assessments provide information and support for staff and candidates.

Detailed checklists with allocated subject-specific marks help to clarify assessor decisions.

The detail and support information provided in the pitch assessment is particularly useful and supportive.

Recording of all pitches provides opportunities for critical analysis and feedback as well as value for internal and external verification purposes.

Specific areas for improvement

There are no specific areas identified for improvement but it is hoped that all centres delivering the award can further share experiences.

Suggestions to consider are:

- ◆ An estimated provisional grading 3–4 weeks before deadlines to give candidates time to develop and add to portfolios.
- ◆ Folio research printed and annotated in some detail rather than listed as a bibliography.
- ◆ Submission to publications encouraged as part of the Graded Unit.