



**Higher National Qualifications
Internal Assessment Report 2015
Management Skills**

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

A small number of centres were verified during 2014–15 within this verification group. All centres have considerable experience in delivering Higher National Units and in the main they have a good understanding of the Units and the assessment approaches. Where support materials and assessment packs are available these are used and centres find these to be of considerable help. Centres generally have well-established systems and procedures for assessment and internal verification which ensure that the Units and the execution of the Units are well supported.

Most staff delivering Units in this verification group are also very experienced but, where less experienced staff were involved, centre systems, particularly those designed to support new staff, were generally robust and ensured that standards were maintained. Despite the revision of some of the HNC Management and Leadership Units, exemplars and assessment materials uptake of the HNC Management and Leadership award continues to be very low. The Management Units verification visits that did take place fell within other award frameworks. The Units verified included: Behavioural Skills for Business (F84L 35); Engineering Supervision: Team Working and Continuous Professional Development (DW71 34); Business Management: an Introduction; (F1RJ 34), Management: Leadership at Work (H1F2 34); and Managing and Working with People (H1F2 34).

Unit specifications, instruments of assessment and exemplification materials

As indicated above, centres appear to be thoroughly familiar with the relevant Unit specifications. Their quality assurance systems through verification and standardisation ensure that the current Unit specifications are in use and assessment instruments checked in this regard. Due to the restructuring of the FE sector a number of centres are still re-aligning their quality assurance systems but with the general underlying principles being the same this did not present a problem.

Centres are also familiar with associated SQA exemplar assessments when these are available for a Unit and these are being used. Where these are not available centres have generally in place robust systems to ensure that assessment instruments that are developed are appropriate. Prior verification is used to ensure the assessments being used are appropriate, which is a clear example of good practice and centres are reminded that this facility is available to them.

The development of master files or packs which contain relevant material for a Unit such as the Unit specification, assessment instruments, notes of internal verification meetings and any items arising, are often held electronically. These packs work well and make assessment, internal verification and external

verification a much easier task and help to ensure that all delivery staff have appropriate up to date information available to them at all times. Learning and teaching materials, including SQA support material for those Units where they are available are now often found on VLEs which helps to ensure that all candidates have the appropriate support materials for assessment.

Evidence Requirements

External verification confirmed, as has been commented upon in previous reports, that centres fully understand the role of Unit Evidence Requirements. SQA exemplar assessment packs play an important role in supporting centres by providing instruments of assessment, assessment checklists and assessment guidelines, which all help to ensure that the Unit Evidence Requirements are understood and met. Many of the Units in this verification group associated with the HNC Management and Leadership are further supported by specially-developed and recently updated SQA support packs which when taken in conjunction with the updated assessment support packs, help to clarify the interpretation of Unit Evidence Requirements. The packs and the exemplars had been used in the two Units which were verified this year and were well received.

Behaviour Skills for Business (F84L 35) was assessed as part of the HN Business pilot alongside Business Culture and Strategy (F7J7 35) and consisted of a combined single assessment. This appears to have worked well and the centre staff had managed the assessment process well (see later) with good results. The mechanistic approach often seen in candidate responses was less so and candidates tended to express terms and ideas in their own words.

The requirement for candidates to demonstrate their understanding through interpretation and application of theories and models continues. There is still a tendency for many candidates to merely regurgitate models in their responses. Centres need to continually stress to candidates that repetition of models/theories is rarely sufficient to pass. In addition, where candidates are expected to use a framework, eg a CPD model, the responses should be of the level and depth stated in the Evidence Requirements.

A few issues worthy of note include:

- ◆ Group activities — centres are generally aware of the need to identify the work of individuals within groups and to attribute evidence. Centres, however, may also wish to create strategies to manage groups where candidates are not contributing and be aware of the impact that this may have on those candidates who are contributing, eg online group discussions where only one or two contribute.
- ◆ Checklists — checklists to help show that Evidence Requirements have been met are useful and centres should consider developing or refining these. In one example the assessment undertaken would have been aided considerably by the use of a checklist. However, while checklists can be extremely useful on their own they are often insufficient and should be supported by other evidence, eg copy of a presentation, video or photographs. Ideally, the checklists should include a narrative, be

countersigned by the candidate and, where appropriate, include a reflection by the candidate regarding their performance.

- ◆ Remediation — again, most centres provide appropriate assessment and remediation opportunities. It is important that where remediation has taken place that this is clearly indicated and that sufficient evidence to demonstrate that it meets the requirements is provided. It is rarely sufficient to merely make a note that the item was discussed and agreed.

Administration of assessments

The development of assessment exemplars for most of the Units verified helps to ensure that assessments are administered in line with the Unit specification. It also helps to ensure that the instruments of assessment are appropriate and enables candidates to generate sufficient evidence of an appropriate standard. The guidance and/or checklists provided in these exemplar packs help to support the assessment decision.

As stated earlier, centres also have well-established internal verification procedures, eg pre-delivery meetings, which ensure that the Unit specification and the assessment instrument being used are current. Where exemplars are used these ensure that the assessment instrument is appropriate and it is encouraging to see that centres do, through their own procedures, verify that this is the case. These internal verification procedures also ensure that assessment decisions are checked as part of a sampling process, feedback is given to assessors and where corrective action is identified it is appropriately actioned. Internal verification procedures in the centres are of a high standard and based on the evidence work well.

Discussions with candidates confirm that planning for assessments is clear and that any requirements as outlined in specific Units are complied with. In the main, candidates are well prepared for their assessments and appropriate support is given. This was particularly well managed in the HN Business pilot where the centre had carefully structured the assessments for all subjects to avoid overload and ensure candidates were well prepared for all assessments. Arrangements for remediation or resubmission of assessments appear to be strong and the evidence made available during this year's visits confirms that this is the case. As indicated earlier, it is important that where remediation is carried out there is sufficient attributable evidence provided.

All centres have in place policies and procedures relating to plagiarism and cheating and all candidates were aware of these policies and the associated penalties. Candidates are generally required to sign a declaration that the work submitted is their own. However, centres do need to ensure through their assessment and verification processes that these procedures are adhered to. There is an increase in the use of packages such as Turnitin to help staff identify plagiarism but the judgement of staff in their knowledge of the subject and, in particular, of their candidates plays a key part.

As in previous years, verification during this session has highlighted that the main issue with Units in this verification group is ensuring that assessment judgements reflect the SCQF level. Often the assessment is quite wide-ranging and cannot cover every possibility and therefore does require a degree of interpretation. As a result, assessors and internal verifiers do not always find it easy to set a suitable standard.

It is worthwhile reiterating the consequences of this, as stated in previous reports.

'This can lead to making more demands on candidates than is warranted by the SCQF level but it can also result in work being accepted which is not fully up to the standard set by the SCQF level attached to the Unit.'

It can also lead to some inconsistency in assessment judgements — this is particularly the case where an assessment consists of a number of discrete questions: responses to some questions clearly meet the relevant SCQF level, but responses to others raise doubts as to whether the appropriate level has been achieved.'

General feedback

The commitment and enthusiasm of staff involved in assessment and internal verification is evident in all reports — particularly the effort they had put in to ensure that all aspects of the assessment process were fully covered. There were some very good examples of assessor feedback where the assessor had taken time to provide a high level of supportive and developmental feedback, which provided clear direction and advice for candidates.

One of the enjoyable aspects of any visit is having the opportunity to meet with candidates. Discussions with candidates this year, as in previous years, highlighted very positive learning experiences. Almost all candidates were very complimentary about the teaching and support that they had received, which is testimony to the hard work and commitment of centre staff. All candidates interviewed indicated that their centre had clear procedures and processes in place for resubmissions, authenticity, appeals and complaints. All of which helps to clarify expectations.

Centres work very hard to ensure equality of access to assessment for candidates and most have excellent support systems in place. These support systems include, in all cases, subject support provided by delivery staff, quite often outwith class, to central support for learners where access to equipment and other specialist resources is available. Discussions with candidates confirm their awareness of the support available and there was sufficient evidence to demonstrate that these support arrangements do work.

Areas of good practice

There were a lot of examples of good practice, several of which have been referred to above. With some repetition of earlier points and previous reports, the

following list summarises the main areas of good practice identified during external verification visits:

- ◆ Strong centre processes with clear, transparent evidence (eg completed forms, minutes of meetings) that standardisation and internal verification procedures were in place and working
- ◆ Master folders/files containing all requisite information for assessment and internal verification
- ◆ Detailed comments from assessors on assessment checklists and scripts which relate to the assessment guidelines provided and help candidates to deepen and further their learning
- ◆ Integration of SQA support packs into learning
- ◆ Extremely high levels of candidate support which is clearly recognised by candidates and is a testimony to centre staff

Specific areas for improvement

Overall, external verification confirmed that centres generally deliver Units in this verification group well. Where there were specific issues raised these are covered in the action points given for that particular visit. As a result, centres should be aware of things they can do which might address their particular situation.

However, the good practice outlined above may help centres to think about their practice and consider whether they could make changes which might enhance the delivery, assessment and internal verification of Units in this verification group.

Centres can also review their practice in the light of improvements suggested to others. The following list shows some of the suggestions for improvement, most of which were made in last year's report but which are still valid:

- ◆ Through standardisation meetings develop extended marking guidelines reflecting the SCQF level (basing them on the guidelines in the exemplars, where these are being used) to emphasise exactly what would and would not be acceptable in a response. This would:
 - make it easier to differentiate more precisely between candidates who had provided an acceptable response and those who had not
 - enable candidates requiring remediation to be given a very clear indication of where their response had fallen short of the standard
 - contribute to consistency among assessors and in the nature and amount of evidence provided by candidates
- ◆ Continue to encourage candidates to provide answers and go beyond mere repetition of theory which can lead to issues of plagiarism. Candidates can demonstrate their understanding of theories by their choice of example and the reasons they give to support it. This could involve:

- choosing a suitable theory, approach or technique
- giving a precise example from the case study and
- giving a reasoned justification why the theory/technique was appropriate in this instance

This should help make candidates aware that in a case study at level 8 it is an understanding of the theory that is being sought. This approach can be incorporated in the extended marking guidelines recommended in the point above.

- ◆ Through assessment and verification procedures ensure that assessment decisions are at the appropriate level and that feedback given to candidates is sufficient and enables the candidate to build on that feedback for future assessments.

Higher National Graded Units

Titles/levels of HN Graded Units verified:

Management and Leadership: Graded Unit 1 (DW2X 34)

General comments

Centres do appear to have a good understanding of the requirements of the Graded Units in general and this seems to be the case for this Graded Unit. There is a greater understanding of what are likely to be suitable topics for the Graded Unit which helps to support candidates in undertaking the task. The staged model should also help the candidates progress and enable them to achieve the maximum grade they can.

Unit specifications, instruments of assessment and exemplification materials

Centres do seem thoroughly familiar with the Unit specification and with the advice given in the exemplar assessment pack. However, it is important to ensure through centre staff development procedures, that new staff are aware of the requirements of the Graded Units and how the management of the Graded Unit is quite different from the other Units in the award.

The importance of the three stages, ie planning, development and evaluation, are critical to the successful completion of the Unit which is fully reflected in the Unit specification and the exemplar. The stages allow assessors and the candidate the opportunity to stop and reflect on the evidence provided at each stage and then to move forward, hopefully, arriving at a much improved final product.

Evidence Requirements

The Evidence Requirements are clearly stated in the Unit specification and are further enhanced by the assessment support pack. These work well and will inevitably require some degree of interpretation and judgement by the assessor as each Graded Unit by its very nature will be different. Centres appear to be aware of this and there is a good understanding of the Evidence Requirements in this respect. The Evidence Requirements are provided in the three stages and it is important that these are adhered to as quite often it is necessary, particularly at the evaluation stage, to reflect on how well the Evidence Requirements from a previous stage had been met.

Administration of assessments

Centres seem to be making use of the marking checklist and associated guidance on marking in the exemplar assessment pack, and assessors continue to make comments to explain the reasoning behind the mark awarded. This greatly helps internal verification and contributes to ensuring that a suitable standard is achieved.

As indicated earlier, the management of the three stages is critical and helps candidates at each stage through clear target setting and the provision of feedback, eg feedback at the planning stage helps to inform the development stage and so on, which helps to ensure that the Evidence Requirements are met.

A failure to follow all three stages impacts considerably as it undermines the premise upon which the Graded Unit is based but more importantly it prevents the candidate from having fair opportunity to meet and achieve the Evidence Requirements to the best of their ability. Adherence to the stages also provides a good base for interim internal verification which helps to quality assure the work being undertaken.

General feedback

Candidates continue to find the Graded Unit a challenge and the management of the stages is a key aspect of this, as is the support and advice given vis-à-vis the choice of project. Candidates are encouraged to use the Units studied to assist them and in how their studies may inform a real issue/situation in their workplace to help them choose their project.

The importance of the planning stage and the feedback given at this stage is critical and has a positive impact on the project and the candidates' likelihood of success.

Areas of good practice

The commitment of staff involved in assessment and internal verification and the support provided is itself good practice and deserves another mention.

The use of assessment checklists taken from the SQA exemplar, which ensures the requirements of the Unit are fully taken into account when making assessment decisions and detailed comments made by assessors to explain the marks awarded.

Specific areas for improvement

While it is difficult to draw conclusions there are areas which centres might consider when reflecting on their practice:

- ◆ Ensure that all stages are assessed in line with the guidelines and that candidates complete each stage and are assessed at each stage before progressing to the next.
- ◆ Centres should encourage candidates to:
 - Clearly specify (eg in the opening section of the planning stage) which Units, or parts of Units, from HNC Management and Leadership contribute to the Graded Unit topic they have chosen.
 - Provide specific reasons to support statements they have made, eg by explaining exactly why a particular method was used.

- Make explicit use of ideas from HNC Management and Leadership — one way of doing this is to use them as reasons to support statements made. This can help to avoid projects becoming atheoretical.
 - Ensure that evidence during the development stage supports their actions and is used through evaluation. This is obviously a balancing act with the previous point.
 - Use headings from the marking guidelines to focus and structure their work.
- ◆ Include the stages of the Graded Unit within the verification sampling plan.