



**Higher National Qualifications
Internal Assessment Report 2016
Music**

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

This report is based on nine external verification visits carried out in 2016. There were three full qualification visits for HN Music, two for Graded Unit 1, one for Graded Unit 2 and three full qualification visits for NC Music. The NC units verified will also be covered in this report for guidance.

Of the nine visits, five resulted in initial outcomes of 'significant strengths', with the others resulting in initial outcomes of 'some strengths and some weaknesses'. Three of the visits required significant actions being set.

From the selection sampled there were centres with very good assessment practice providing learners with high-quality experiences. Some centres require further work with areas for particular attention being sufficiency of evidence, appropriate marking guidelines and checklists, and ensuring that the internal verification process is robust.

Unit specifications, instruments of assessment and exemplification materials

Most centres in this sampling group were using up to date unit specifications, valid instruments of assessment and SQA exemplars (where appropriate).

In one centre there wasn't a valid assessment for Performing Music on One Instrument/Voice (F3F4 12). There were no assessment conditions and the assessment supplied did not ensure that the necessary evidence would be generated. Assessors found it difficult to justify and explain assessment decisions as they did not have marking guidelines and were not making adequate use of checklists. The internal verification system should have flagged up the validity of assessment and lack of checklists and marking guidelines. There were at least four assessors and marking guidelines would have ensured that all assessors were marking to the same standard. It is recommended that all centres have marking guidelines defining acceptable candidate responses to assessment.

In one centre, the assessment brief for (F58F 12) Creative Project also enabled candidates to generate evidence for another unit from the group award.

In the verification sample one centre had provided high quality learning experiences for Live Performance Skills 2 (DR2L 35) by generating assessment evidence in several external professional venues. The centre had also effectively integrated assessment evidence with Music First Study 2: Instrument (F604 34).

In all centres visited in the verification sample, all assessors were using the current unit specification. Almost all centres had up-to-date supporting documentation with valid, reliable, equitable and fair assessments. From the verification sample most assessors were marking evidence accurately and consistently in accordance with appropriate marking schemes. It is recommended

that all centres ensure they have appropriate marking schemes defining the range of acceptable assessment responses.

Evidence requirements

Most of the centres in the verification sample had a clear understanding of the evidence requirements for the units verified. In most of the centres in the verification sample, evidence was well organised, met the required standard and was accurately judged against the SQA requirements.

In two of the graded unit visits (one for Graded Unit 1, the other for Graded Unit 2), insufficient evidence was presented. In the Graded Unit 2 visit, internal verification had identified the shortfall in evidence and the generous grading of evidence but the assessor had not responded to the internal verification actions resulting in actions being set by the external verifier. There is more detail on these visits in the graded unit section of this report.

In one centre, insufficient evidence had been provided for Songwriting 1 (DJ35 34). The minimum requirement for notation in outcome 1 is lyrics with chords indicated at appropriate points.

In one centre sampled, not all candidates had produced individual plans for Creative Project (F58F 12) and an action was set that all candidates had to have sufficient evidence of their planning. In the same centre, there was insufficient evidence for Performing Music on One Instrument/Voice (F3F4 12).

In almost all centres there was evidence of pre-delivery checks and internal verification sampling of candidate work. In almost all the centres where actions had to be set, the internal verification process had not identified the issues. It is worth reminding centres of the duties of the internal verifier to check that the unit specification is current, the assessment is valid and will produce the required evidence, and that the assessor is judging against the standard specified in the unit specification.

Administration of assessments

In most of the sample verification group if SQA-developed exemplars existed they were used, and assessments were administered with appropriate conditions. In six of the nine verification visits, centres were well organised, used valid assessments and had completed pre-delivery checks and internal verification sampling of assessment decisions. Evidence was found, on these six visits, to be well-organised and presented with the bulk of evidence being available in digital format.

In one centre Music: Live Performance Skills 1 (DJ2A 34) created a volume of live performance opportunities that went well beyond what would be expected for this unit. This required considerable organisation on the part of the centre staff and is to be commended.

One centre had issues with Performing Music on One Instrument/Voice (F3F4 12). In addition to the issues already covered in this report there were no conditions on the assessment instrument used – the assessment was not deemed to be reliable. Candidate evidence had not been marked against a checklist, with individual tutors all taking a different approach to collecting evidence and judging it against SQA requirements. With evidence of student performance, performances had been saved but there had been no attempt to define a suitable response from the candidates. For example, vocalists' pitch would be off at several points in the captured performances. The assessors (and verifiers) were unable to demonstrate how they had decided if this was acceptable or not. It is essential to have marking guidelines to define acceptable candidate responses and standardise assessment decisions across multiple assessors.

Performance evidence is easily authenticated as it is usually comprised of video evidence of candidate performance. Where assessment requires written responses, only some centres sampled were using plagiarism detection software. It is recommended that all centres move towards plagiarism detection software solutions – 'Google searching' is unreliable and will not detect submissions made by candidates in the same year group, previous year groups or at other institutions.

General feedback

In almost all centres in the verification sample, feedback to candidates was very good. The best examples were not only well documented but also clearly identified the extent to which the learner had met the requirement and remediation needed.

In the verification sample, even in centres where significant actions were set, feedback from candidates was positive. Recurring themes in candidate feedback were that they believed they received a high level of academic support from those with practical experience as music professionals. Where candidates had received extensive feedback they reported that they valued this level of individual feedback. Almost all centres in the verification sample had taken a very thorough approach to ensuring that candidates selected were appropriately matched to the award.

Assessment evidence, from most of the centres in the sample group, was well presented and organised. In several of the centres where actions had to be set, clearer marking guidelines would have assisted the assessor and provided earlier opportunities to give feedback to the candidates on the extent to which they had met the standard.

Areas of good practice

Across the sample group the level of resources and expertise of tutors was found to be very good. Some centres provide access to professional facilities and live performances are realistic, conducted in professional venues for a paying audience.

The staging of live performances in realistic public spaces was judged to be good practice in three of the centres visited. In at least one case, the delivery of the live performance units generated commercial income.

In one case Live Performance Skills 2 (DR2L 35) had been successfully integrated with First Study 2 (F604 35) reducing the volume of assessment. In another, the centre had provided multiple opportunities for Live Performance Skills 1 (DJ2A 34), going far beyond the expected commitment of staff and ensuring that candidates could fully meet the SQA requirements. One centre had integrated Creative Project (F58F 12) so that it enabled candidates to generate evidence for another unit in the award. One delivery of Live Performance (F5E5 12) took the candidates on tour and generated income from the events providing a realistic performance experience and going beyond the requirements for performance to an audience.

Almost all centres in the verification sample had taken a very thorough approach to ensuring that candidates selected were appropriately matched to the award.

Specific areas for improvement

Most centres in the verification sample had no significant specific areas for improvement. However, across the sample group there were three specific areas for improvement identified:

- ◆ Clearer marking guidelines need to be developed in some centres to ensure standardisation and clear measuring of standards.
- ◆ Some centres had developed instruments of assessment that did not fully capture SQA evidence requirements. It is recommended that centres review the effectiveness of the internal verification process so that they are confident the internal verifier has fully checked the assessment instrument against the evidence requirements in the unit specification.
- ◆ In some centres internal verifiers had signed off assessment decisions where the candidate hadn't fully met the evidence requirements in the unit specification. It is recommended that centres review the effectiveness of the internal verification process so that they are confident it is a meaningful exercise.

Higher National graded units

Titles/levels of HN graded units verified:

Music: Graded Unit 2 (DR33 35)

Music: Graded Unit 1 (F508 34)

General comments

There were three graded unit verification events in total this session: two for Music: Graded Unit 1 (F508 34) and one for Music: Graded Unit 2 (DR33 35). Two of the three visits resulted in actions being set with only one initial outcome of 'significant strengths'. From the verification sample it would suggest that there are still improvements to be made before stating that all centres have a clear and accurate understanding of the national standard for HN Music Graded Units 1 and 2.

Unit specifications, instruments of assessment and exemplification materials

From this verification sample, all centres visited were familiar with the unit specifications, had developed appropriate instruments of assessment and were familiar with exemplification materials. The problems in centres requiring actions related to their understanding of, or ability to meet, the evidence requirements. In one centre the assessment that had been developed encouraged the candidates to undertake a separate project, in addition to the Graded Unit 1 portfolio. It is recommended that the briefs set for Graded Unit 1 are closely aligned with the briefs from the assessment support pack (ASP) so that candidates are focused on Graded Unit 1 being the production of a portfolio and the roles they are producing a portfolio in support of are clearly defined.

Evidence requirements

The sampled evidence would suggest that not all centres have a complete understanding of all the evidence requirements for HN Music Graded Units 1 and 2 or that not all centres were able to produce evidence that fully satisfied the requirements of HN Music Graded Units 1 and 2.

There is much high-quality student work being produced in the Music graded units across the sector. However in the verification sample there were a number of issues to be addressed.

One centre had been generous in its marking of HN Music Graded Unit 1. This was particularly evident in the marking of the sections relating to copyright and marketing. If a learner has submitted a basic, sufficient response then the marks allocation for that section should relate to a C grade. There is further guidance on this in the marking guidelines in the ASPs. In the other HN Music Graded Unit 1 visit the evidence of performance artefacts in the development did not meet the minimum requirement of three artefacts.

In the HN Music Graded Unit 2 sampled in this verification activity there were a number of issues to be addressed. The centre had not generated sufficient evidence to justify the marks awarded. Evidence presented was slight – there should be significant evidence in the development to show appropriate musical skills through studio or live recordings. The subject was being delivered and assessed by a non-subject specialist. This presented several problems in giving the learners the necessary guidance at mentor sessions and in judging the evidence presented. It is highly recommended that HN Music graded units are delivered by a subject specialist. In this centre, the internal verifier had produced comprehensive reports and clear guidance on the direction of travel needed to correct these issues but the internal verifier's advice had not been acted on resulting in actions set by the external verifier.

Administration of assessments

In all centres in the verification sample for HN Music Graded Units 1 and 2, appropriate instruments of assessment were in use. In one centre, it was recommended that the briefs for HN Music Graded Unit 1 be aligned with those in the ASP, so that learners were focused on producing a portfolio. In the other HN Music Graded 1 verification visit, several learners hadn't submitted the minimum number of performance artefacts specified in the unit specification.

In one centre, HN Music Graded Unit 1 learner work had been collected and uploaded via Mahara. This kept the work well-organised but did not produce a portfolio easily presented to potential employers or higher education establishments as the unit specification requires.

In the HN Music Graded Unit 2 visit, there was no record of mentoring meetings for most of the candidates. Authenticity can usually be determined from the personal nature of the projects and in the one-to-one discussion during mentoring meetings. The learners had completed development stages that the assessor was judging to be correct, without any guidance, which raised the question of the steps that had been taken to ensure authenticity. This resulted in an action to check the authenticity of all submissions. In this visit the internal verification had been found to be exemplary and identified all issues and the direction of travel required to address them but the centre had not responded to the actions set by the internal verifier.

There are many examples of learners producing a high standard of work in HN Music across the sector and the administration of assessment facilitating this work. However, from the verification sample, further improvements are needed before all centres are secure in the administration of HN Music graded unit assessments. Delivering centres should ensure that:

- ◆ All briefs are focused on producing a portfolio for HN Music Graded Unit 1
- ◆ There must be a minimum of three performance artefacts for HN Music Graded Unit 1

- ◆ The main focus of both Music Graded Units 1 and 2 should be showcasing the musical skills from the core subjects
- ◆ Appropriate steps have been taken to ensure authenticity of the learners' work.
- ◆ The internal verification system is robust and actions set by the internal verifiers have been carried out

General feedback

From two of the three centres in the verification sample, feedback to the candidates was satisfactory giving clear guidance to the extent that they had met the standard and any remediation required. In one centre the feedback given on HN Music Graded Unit 1 was comprehensive and detailed. In the HN Music Graded Unit 2 verification visit the learners stated that they would have liked Music-specific guidance – the assessor was not a music specialist. It is highly recommended that HN Music Graded Units 1 and 2 are delivered and assessed by subject specialists.

Feedback from learners interviewed on these graded unit visits generally covered the whole qualification. They appreciated excellent facilities and the experience and expertise of the staff delivering HN Music.

Areas of good practice

The feedback from learners identified access to excellent facilities and experienced staff. From this small verification sample, the exemplary internal verification records, guidance and actions set by the internal verifier were highlighted from one visit – vital in improving the quality of the assessment process and quality of the learners' work and experience.

A significant proportion of the sample of learners' portfolios contained highly professional work and provided further evidence of rich and varied experience gained while undertaking the qualification – delivering staff had taken considerable time to provide these opportunities.

Specific areas for improvement

From the small verification sample the following specific areas for improvement were identified:

- ◆ HN Music Graded Unit 1: all areas of the portfolio development should be marked according to the guidance in the unit specification and the marking guidelines in the ASP. Where a basic sufficient response has been provided, a mark equivalent to a grade C should only be given for that section.
- ◆ The minimum evidence requirements are that there are at least three music performance artefacts in HN Music Graded Unit 1.
- ◆ The focus of the development section in HN Music Graded Unit 2 should be the showcasing of musical skills and musicality reflected in the mandatory

units of the qualification. These must be sufficient to justify the marks allocated.

- ◆ HN Music Graded Units 1 and 2 should be assessed by subject specialists
- ◆ Actions set by internal verifiers to comply with SQA requirements should be completed.
- ◆ Appropriate steps must be taken to ensure authenticity of learners' work.