



**Higher National Qualifications  
Internal Assessment Report 2016  
Sound Production**

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 10 external verification visits carried out in the 2015/16 session. There were five full qualification visits for HN Sound Production and two visits for Sound Production: Graded Unit 2. In addition to these there were three full qualification visits for the NC in Sound Production. Conclusions from the NC visits have also been included in this report.

Of this external verification sample, four of the ten visits resulted in an initial outcome of 'significant strengths', five in 'some strengths, some weaknesses' and one in 'significant weaknesses'. Two of the visits resulted in significant actions being set.

This verification sample would suggest that most centres have a clear and accurate understanding of the national standards for Sound Production but some centres have further work to do to achieve this.

## Unit specifications, instruments of assessment and exemplification materials

From this external verification sample, it appears that most assessors are familiar with unit specifications, instruments of assessment and exemplification materials as almost half of those sampled had significant strengths. Of those remaining, in almost all centres the initial outcome rating of 'some strengths, some weaknesses' resulted from an issue in a single unit.

Of the visits resulting in a 'significant strengths' outcome, one centre had made particularly good use of case studies and realistic contexts in the assessment of Sound Production Theory 2 (H1M2 35). Most of the centres in the sample group visited had up-to-date master packs containing unit specifications, instruments of assessment, model answers and checklists, candidate records and internal verification forms and materials. Most centres were using the new assessment support materials for Acoustics 1 (DJ1W 35) and it is recommended that all centres do so.

In the NC verification sample, almost all unit specifications, instruments of assessment and exemplification materials were appropriate and evidence verified was marked accurately. The only exceptions related to Sound: Understanding the Signal Path. There were two instances of centres not matching assessment instruments to the evidence criteria. Outcome 2 and 3 evidence relates to a Stereo Recording System and a Sound Reinforcement System — only one had been assessed resulting in an action to address.

## Evidence requirements

The sampled evidence would suggest that in the main there is a clear understanding of the evidence requirements for the Sound Production units

sampled. Generally, for the units verified there was evidence of pre-delivery checks and regular internal verification, including sampling of student work.

In some centres the external verifier remarked on the high quality student work. In some centres, evidence had been generated producing work for external clients providing candidates with an authentic experience.

Several centres could improve the matching of evidence to SQA requirements through more detailed marking schemes and evidence checklists.

In one centre, multiple choice assessments had been used across Sound Production Theory 1 (H1M1 34) and 2 (H1M2 35) and Digital Audio Theory (H1M5 35). The assessment designed did not generate the necessary evidence, at the correct level. Arbitrary pass marks had been set, enabling candidates to pass who hadn't met all the evidence requirements. Evidence was not generated under appropriate conditions — online instruments of assessment gave direct links to teaching materials that would, if accessed, give candidates direct answers to assessment. The internal verification system did not pick this up or that evidence generated did not meet SQA requirements. The problems encountered as a result reinforce the need for centres to clearly define acceptable evidence, choose appropriate methods of assessment and ensure that internal verification is meaningful.

### **Administration of assessments**

From the verification sample, most assessments are valid in construction, administered appropriately with evidence accurately judged against SQA requirements.

Some centres had very clear marking guidance with detailed checklists helping the assessor and verifier consistently judge the standard. Where problems were encountered on a verification visit, lack of clear marking guidelines contributed to the problem. It is recommended that all centres review their marking guidelines.

One centre visited had improved the learner experience by developing realistic contexts and case studies for the assessment of Sound Production Theory 2 (H1M2 35). In another centre, practical assessment involved producing work for external clients of the studio, developing the learners' employability, and testing their knowledge and skills in a realistic context.

In most centres thorough internal verification of the assessment and evidence had taken place. Where problems were encountered, almost all of them could have been detected before the verification visit by thorough checking at the internal verification stage.

In one instance, multiple choice assessments were not deemed valid to test the necessary skills in Sound Production Theory 1, Sound Production Theory 2 and Digital Audio Theory. Multiple choice assessments are very difficult to construct for these units and it is recommended that centres use another method of assessment. The *SQA Guide to Assessment* document contains valuable

information on devising instruments of assessment and is recommended reading for all centre staff assessing or verifying qualifications. In the assessments devised for Sound Production Theory 1 & 2 and Digital Audio Theory, pass marks that have been specified in the unit specification had not been set. When devising an assessment instrument, it is necessary to check that the assessment will allow evidence to be generated to meet all requirements – in a poorly designed assessment it is possible that a learner may achieve the arbitrary pass mark without meeting all requirements.

### **General feedback**

In most centres feedback to candidates was very good, identifying what they had achieved and any areas to be addressed. In one case, candidates were provided with a direct link to teaching notes that, if accessed, would give the candidate the answer to the question. This was deemed to be an unreasonable amount of assistance.

In all centres, feedback from candidates was positive. All candidates believed they were receiving high quality tuition and many mentioned that the tutors were experienced and supportive. The standard of facilities used across the sector is very high with some centres also running as commercial audio facilities. In some centres the standard of work produced was very high.

There were some recurring issues that, if addressed, could improve the delivery and assessment of the HN Sound Production qualifications. In general, extending the use of detailed marking guidelines would help assessors and verifiers standardise. In centres where internal verification was a meaningful process, very few issues were encountered and it is recommended that centres review the effectiveness of the verification process and action improvements where necessary.

### **Areas of good practice**

In general, the level of candidate support in the verification sample was very high. Candidates described a supportive recruitment process where prior experience was matched to the demands of the course. In all centres, candidates found that their tutors were experienced and supportive.

In Sound Production Theory 2 (H1M2 35) realistic contexts and case studies had improved the learner experience. In another, the use of actual commercial briefs for practical assessment improved learners' employability by providing the chance to benchmark against actual industry practice.

Good practice was found in the centres that had produced detailed marking guidelines. The detailed marking guidelines provided the assessor with clarity and helped both assessor and verifier ensure that candidate evidence met the standard.

## **Specific areas for improvement**

Specific areas for improvement identified from the verification sample are:

- ◆ The updated assessment support materials for Acoustics 1 (DJ1W 35) should be used.
- ◆ It is recommended that the SQA devised exemplar for Digital Audio Theory (H1M5 35) is used.
- ◆ It is recommended that all centres have detailed marking guidelines to ensure consistency in marking across assessors and verifiers.
- ◆ Where problems have been identified, it is recommended that centres review the effectiveness of the internal verification process to ensure that it is meaningful.
- ◆ Valid assessment conditions should be stated clearly on all instruments of assessment.

# Higher National graded units

Titles/levels of HN graded units verified:

Two instances of Sound Production: Graded Unit 2 (DR2R 35) were verified.

## General comments

The sample verification group was made up of two centres. From such a small group it is not reasonable to suggest that these visits give an accurate account of the extent to which centres have a clear and accurate understanding of the requirements of national standards. One visit resulted in an initial outcome of 'significant strengths', the other in 'some strengths, some weaknesses'. Both visits raised questions as to the evidence to be retained for verification.

## Unit specifications, instruments of assessment and exemplification materials

Both centres verified were familiar with the graded unit specification, instruments of assessment and exemplification materials to an extent. Both centres were using the current graded unit specification and support materials. One centre required actions to be set as they had not retained the audio/video — a requirement of the graded unit. The other had not retained the portfolios as the graded unit specification did not clearly state that these should be retained. Further guidance will be provided to centres to ensure that portfolios are retained by all centres.

## Evidence requirements

From the small verification sample of two centres, there are improvements to be made before stating that there is a clear understanding of the evidence requirements. Both centres verified had used the current graded unit specification, support materials and had checklists for capturing the evidence. In one centre, they had not retained the video of the interview and presentation or the candidate audio evidence. An action was set to supply the appropriate evidence for the candidates and a return visit was required to verify the evidence generated. It was recommended that where there is a problem, internal verification takes place at each stage of the graded unit, until certain that there is confidence in that stage being correct. In the second centre, candidates had completed each stage of the graded unit but the underlying portfolio had not been retained in addition to the presentation, interview and logbook — guidance has been issued that the portfolios should be retained so that the evidence, viewed or heard briefly during the presentation, can be verified.

## Administration of assessments

As there were only two verification visits, there is not an accurate gauge of administration of assessments across the sector from this verification sample. The Sound Production Graded Unit 2 should comprise three stages: planning, development and evaluation. Candidates are entitled to a series of mentor

meetings. For the development stage, candidates select items from their portfolio to present in support of a job brief. The presentation is followed by an interview and the presentation and interview are filmed, the video kept for verification. In one of the centres verified, from the evidence available the candidates had not received appropriate guidance during the planning and development stage as to the kind of evidence and artefacts suitable for inclusion. Earlier verification can help identify this problem and is recommended until there is confidence the candidates are on track. Centres should prepare for the presentation/interview section and have made the necessary arrangements to video this evidence. Centres should reference the portfolio that the presentation is drawn from as candidates are graded on selecting the material and the audio quality of the material — something that it can be difficult to judge from audio captured on the mic during presentation.

### **General feedback**

Feedback to the candidates on these two visits was varied. In one centre candidates had not been given enough guidance during the mentoring sessions about the kind of artefacts that should be included in the Graded Unit 2. On the other visit, the candidates would have benefitted from specialist knowledge on the quality of their materials.

Candidates interviewed on the visits had enjoyed their course and believed their tutors to be supportive. Some of the candidates had produced very high-quality work.

Support for candidates could be improved with earlier internal verification to ensure that each stage of the Graded Unit 2 is on track, and conducting meaningful standardisation and double-marking exercises.

### **Areas of good practice**

Across the sector there are many instances of good practice with candidates producing very high quality work that prepares them for employment or articulation to higher education. In one of the two centres visited in this sample group several of the candidates had been successful in securing university places based on successful completion of the Graded Unit 2.

The Sound Production Graded Unit 2 should comprise three stages: planning, development and evaluation. Candidates are entitled to a series of mentor meetings. For the development stage, candidates select items from their portfolio to present in support of a job brief. The presentation is followed by an interview and the presentation and interview are filmed, the video kept for verification. For good practice the assessment of the Sound Production Graded Unit 2 work should be conducted in a manner that is realistic in an employment context and the audio work produced should be of high-quality and highly individual for each candidate.

## **Specific areas for improvement**

Specific areas for improvement that have been identified for Sound Production Graded Unit 2 for some centres:

- ◆ Ensure that the Graded Unit 2 is on track at each stage
- ◆ Conduct meaningful internal verification
- ◆ Conduct meaningful standardisation and cross-marking
- ◆ Recording of evidence on checklists must be accurate
- ◆ The presentation/interview must be filmed and the video footage retained for internal verification
- ◆ The portfolio should be retained for verification
- ◆ If clarification on the standards is needed by a verifier, this should be done prior to delivery