Business Graded Unit

The purpose of this report is to provide feedback to centres on verification in Higher National Qualifications in this subject.

Higher National Graded Units

F8LD 34   Business Graded Unit 1 (SCQF level 7)
F8LE 35   Business Graded Unit 2 (SCQF level 8)

General comments

As per last year, the main focus of central verification was on the new Business Graded Unit 1 (F8LD 34), which was being delivered by a number of centres for the first time. In addition, a number of centres that had adopted the new HND award in 2010 were delivering Business Graded Unit 2 (F8LE 35) for the first time, and visits were made to centres as in previous years for Business Graded Unit 2.

External verification was very successful and it is evident that centres have a good appreciation of the requirements, demands and standards attached to each of the new Graded Units. This understanding has undoubtedly been helped by having had Graded Units in place for several years, and by the new Units being an evolution of the ones that were contained in the old awards.

Unit specifications, instruments of assessment and exemplification materials

Assessors have quickly familiarised themselves with the new Unit specifications and the exemplars. The continuing move by centres to the new awards with the new Graded Units has, as a result, tended to be relatively fault-free. The Business Graded Unit 2 project will take a period of time to bed in, and centres will adapt their delivery based on their experiences. New centres continue to find the Units a challenge.

Evidence Requirements

Assessors generally have a good appreciation of the Evidence Requirements and of how best to deliver the Units. With the increased familiarity of having an examined Graded Unit as part of an award, there is a danger of a loss of focus in marking. It is important that centres continue to remind themselves that it is not sufficient to award marks for identification without relevant explanations in support of the points identified. As per the advice in previous years, it is strongly advised that, before marking, a markers' meeting takes place to refresh those involved of the marking requirements and to enhance consistency.

In the project there have been changes, including the addition of the diary/log, the removal of the 'criteria' and the increase in credit value to two credits. Again, most centres were able to adapt from the old Unit to the new one with relative ease. There are however a number of continuing issues, not least that candidates find the completion of a project a significant challenge.

One concern was the timely submission of the component parts of the project. Centres need to continue to devise means to ensure that the project is completed by candidates in a staged and managed manner. This is an ongoing issue and it is important that delivery of the Unit is carefully managed by those tasked with its delivery.

Administration of assessments

Most of the centres are now very familiar with administering the delivery of the Graded Units, but it is important to remember that the Units continue to pose a significant challenge for staff and candidates alike. New centres continue to find the Units particularly challenging, and often take a year to find their feet.

Centres are tending to prepare candidates for the examination through the use of practice questions based on practice case studies, and focus on helping the candidates to develop examination technique. As in last year's, report it is worth reminding centres that they are strongly advised not to base practice questions on the actual case study that will be used for the examination. Such a practice, even with the best intentions, can lead candidates towards identifying some of the actual examination questions, resulting in a set of similar responses. This can lead to severe consequences for a centre, its staff and the candidates.

In a small number of cases, some centres are introducing the option for candidates of word processing their examination responses. There are a number of implications, mainly in the area of security, that a centre would have to demonstrate they have satisfied for such an approach to be acceptable. There are also issues regarding the reliability of IT equipment that need to carefully considered. It would not be acceptable for centres to force candidates to word process their responses.

In the project, some candidates continue to find it difficult to identify a suitable project topic, and continuing guidance from centres remains crucial. The timely submission of the three project sections can be a major problem, and strategies need to be devised and put in place for when this occurs.

With the new project, some centres felt that they would make adjustment in terms of emphasis next year. One feeling was that there was a danger that candidates were erring towards producing general business projects without strong links to specific subjects, topics and theories within the core subjects. Another feeling was that the diary/log needed to get more attention from candidates and that they had not fully understood its relevance. These and other adjustments in focus will be made and centres will continue to adapt delivery year on year.

Internal verification remains an essential process in helping to check quality and maintain standards. Two errors were identified in the second exemplar for the examination, and without the diligence of centres passing the exemplar through the internal verification process, the errors would not have been identified and corrected.

General feedback

Feedback to candidates in the project continues to be good and remains an important tool in directing candidates towards how they might improve performance. As in previous years, centres need to continue to clearly identify marks on the examination scripts, and to identify marks for each component in the project. It is particularly important in the project to identify the criteria that have been met for the awarding of marks above the minimum required.

Candidates in general found both of the Graded Units a challenge, with no real preference between examinations versus a project. No access issues were identified during verification.

Areas of good practice

Centres are now relatively adept at delivering and assessing the examination of the Graded Unit. Most centres now implement what was identified as good practice in the early days of the examination, so that it has now become normal practice. For example, almost all centres double mark all scripts or a sample, hold a markers meeting to discuss marking, provide comments where a mark might be borderline, etc. These practices are now widely adopted and help make the assessment of the examination scripts transparent.

In the project, innovations tended to be relatively simple. Some centres provided templates to help candidates to maintain a detailed and useful log of their activities and experiences. Some logs were paper-based, while others were in electronic format. In some instances, the marking sheets were adjusted to allow for more comprehensive feedback and advice. The level of feedback was also an area that was generally very comprehensive and deserves recognition.

Specific areas for improvement

There are always areas that can be improved, but these may vary from one year to another. There were a few instances where marks were right on the margin of the grade boundary, which can place a centre in a difficult position when feeding back how narrowly a candidate has missed out on a higher grade.

To avoid such situations, the centre may decide only to provide grades for successful candidates rather than specific marks, as candidates will be given a grade on certification and not a mark. Alternatively, if possible, it is best if marks right on the boundary just below a grade are avoided. It is recognised that on occasions a 59% is precisely that and it is not a 58%.

As mentioned earlier in the report, the careful management of candidates' submissions of the project components is an ongoing area that requires continued attention. Centres must devise and implement strategies to maintain control over submission dates for each of the stages of the project.