Higher National and Vocational Qualifications Internal Assessment Report 2012

Further Education

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

Higher National Units

G85C 18	PDA Teaching in Further Education: An Introduction	G85D 18	PDA Teaching in Further Education
DV5X 36	Teaching Further Education: Planning	DV5K 36	Facilitate Learning, Teaching and Assessment
DV5V 36	Teaching in Further Education: Delivery and Assessment	DV5L 36	Develop Professional Practice
		DV5P 36	Plan and Prepare the Learning Environment
G8RE 49	**PDA Managing and Leading a Curriculum Team**		
F1HK 36	Managing Curriculum Processes	F1HL 36	Managing Curriculum Teams

General comments

The centres delivering the PDAs which have had an External Verifier visit during this session are consistently demonstrating that they have fully grasped and implemented, since 2006, the requirements of the national standards (ie professional standards for lecturers in Scotland's colleges). These professional standards for lecturers underwent a period of consultation about their content and relevance to the work of today's lecturers during the beginning of 2012 and a report with the refreshed standards was published in March 2012.

The foreword of the report by Graeme Hyslop, Chair, Professional Learning and Development Forum (PLDF), stated:

'the unanimous view of the sector was that only a refresh of the standards was required to maintain their relevance'

thus confirming that the 2006 standards are still mainly relevant today.

All centres have been and will be encouraged to update their practice in line with the refreshed standards in this report as they are visited by the External Verifiers.

Unit specifications, instruments of assessment and exemplification materials

All six centres offering these PDAs visited in session 2011-2012 use established teams of well-qualified FE lecturers who are experienced in working with SQA Unit specifications, instruments of assessment and unit exemplar materials. The instruments of assessment that they are all currently using have been in existence for many years and so the delivery and assessing team of lecturers are very familiar with the assessment evidence that is required. Consistency and competence of assessment judgements by assessors is constantly discussed in these centres and new members of staff are well inducted into this approach.

Notes from a visit:
'Staff were informed that I had looked through the master folders and all candidate portfolios provided and I was satisfied that assessors are making consistent assessment decisions meeting SQA requirements. All assessors are using SQA exemplars and checklists therefore observations carried out by various assessors are able to match the same criteria.'

Evidence Requirements

SQA assessment exemplars and checklist templates are used by all centres, thus the assessors have by now all standardised their practice. Using these SQA materials means that assessors and candidates can be assured that they are following valid and reliable assessment procedures. There are still some instances where lecturers like confirmation from the External Verifier during their visit that candidates' work is reaching SCQF Level 9 as required by the Evidence Requirements.

'We discussed the type of writing to expect at Level 9 and the need to refer to and apply theorists' views to their own practice.'

'I was able to see a variety of assessment methods – from workplace products such as learning resources and lesson plans to candidate reports – which were well referenced and appropriate for Level 9 candidates.'

Administration of assessments

Again this session showed clear evidence that the centres visited all ensure that their candidates are given fair access to assessment.

For example,
'Part time staff who could not access workshops were supported by the assessor individually when required and stated they did not feel at a disadvantage.'

'Candidates are assessed fairly, and are observed at times to suit their timetables. An assessment plan is provided; however, candidates can negotiate to meet their needs.'

All assessments are pitched at the appropriate SCQF Level 9, as all centres visited this session use SQA exemplar material and templates.

It would seem to be common practice for candidates to be given a learning, teaching and assessment plan of some kind at their induction which clearly shows when assessments should be submitted. This helps to keep candidates on track and shows them how the programme for each Unit will be rolled out. Centres tend to deliver short workshops around the content for assessments, explaining theories and sometimes engaging candidates in peer observation of mini teaching sessions. Nearly all centres now encourage submission of assessments by e-mail or online through a VLE to their assessor.

Internal verification continues in all centres according to their college quality procedures – there is usually a separate master or internal verification folder with sampling records and feedback to the assessors and copies of formal standardisation meeting minutes.

General feedback

All external verification visit reports this session remarked on the assessment practice and candidate support within centres in terms such as 'robust', 'excellent', 'helpful' and 'beneficial'. There is a common theme throughout all the centres of aiming to demonstrate good practice in learning and teaching to their candidates. Therefore, planning and setting assessments, marking and giving feedback on assessment submissions timeously is found in all centres, as evidenced through discussions with candidates.

Most candidates in discussion with External Verifiers gave positive feedback on the programmes and the benefits they had received:

'In discussing the course with nine candidates individually, all felt they had benefitted from the course, with some stating they have changed to more interactive teaching styles as a result. The micro-teaching session with feedback from their peers was particularly helpful. The weekly two-hour tutorial was very useful as time could be dedicated to course work and access to computers was provided. Candidates enjoyed meeting colleagues from other curriculum areas and were able to share ideas during group work. Some candidates commented that they were more reflective practitioners now and will continue to use reflective logs in future.'

Feedback was an important area which is also 'robust' in some of the centres visited and commented widely upon within the reports.

'All (candidates) found their assessors to be extremely helpful and supportive and had benefited from classroom observations followed by feedback from their assessors.'

'…. good constructive feedback on observations, with actions where required, was provided by assessors.'

'The written and verbal feedback he received, in word comments at the side of his work, was very well received, as was the support and guidance from his assessor…'

There is once again strong evidence that candidates are enjoying and benefiting from the PDA awards and the opportunity they present to share their experiences and issues with other members of staff.

'…. one candidate discussed the course with enthusiasm. She could articulate the benefits of the course to her professionalism and the confidence she has developed in her learning delivery. The course has both confirmed some of her approaches as good practice and offered her a wider range of strategies for dealing with issues that arise within the classroom.'

It is heartening to see that centres delivering the PDAs are more consistently using more new technologies and really encouraging their candidates to participate in this change.

'We discussed the benefits of the micro-teaching sessions that candidates had commented on; assessors agreed that these sessions are extremely challenging and helpful to candidates.'

'Assessors use interactive whiteboards during tutorials and encourage candidates to use these during observed sessions as well as their everyday delivery.'

'The learning materials for the PDAs are also online in the VLE and the assessor decided in consultation with the candidates that they should be broken down into topic format to make it easier for candidates to find exactly what they were looking for.'

Discussions on the importance of using the Harvard referencing in PDA assignments and the issues arising from using different versions are still continuing with centres. However, nearly all centres now explain and encourage the use of Harvard referencing.

Areas of good practice

There continues to be a lot of good learning and teaching practice demonstrated in the PDA awards:

'… candidates have access to a Facebook site to write a blog and share experience with their peers.'

'The centre was also congratulated on its use of the VLE to support candidates and the fact that they were receptive to using Flip cameras and digital recording to gather evidence.'

'The way observation of teaching delivery and assessment practice is embedded into the quality systems of the college is particularly supportive of the need for observation of practice that is required by these Units.'

'The variety of support mechanisms used to facilitate candidate progress demonstrate good practice.'

'The support given by the Internal Verifier both in feedback and observation of practice has been of very practical use to a new member of staff delivering these Units. In most colleges these awards are delivered by long-established members of staff. This is induction showing good practice.'

'The micro-teaching sessions with peer feedback before assessors do classroom observations demonstrates good practice as candidates gain confidence in new delivery styles.'

Specific areas for improvement

Some centres could improve their feedback practice by recording the feedback either in writing, or digitally, or by audiocast. It is essential that candidates have a

lasting record of the feedback to give them encouragement. This also applies to feedback from the Internal Verifier to the assessor.

Centres might like to consider using professional discussion more to probe candidates' level of knowledge in the areas unlikely to be evidenced through observation of performance. This discussion can be evidenced by digitally recording it and putting a CD in the candidate's portfolio. Also using the assessment exemplar for each Unit which highlights the areas that may not be evidenced any other way than through a professional discussion.

'…Also discussed was the evidence produced by candidates so far, particularly the need to identify in the lesson plans how ICT is used to support learning and how ICT is used in the lessons during the observations. This would add to the quality of this evidence.'