



Internal Assessment Report: HN Business Graded Unit

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 Graded Units

Titles/levels of HN Graded Units verified

DE3V 35: HN Business Graded Unit 2 SCQF level 8

DE3W 35: HN Business Graded Unit 3 SCQF level 8

Feedback to centres

General comments

As a result of SQA's external verification strategy the Graded Units have, in the past few years, been a focus for significant external verification activity. As in 2008, the activity this year has taken place both at a central verification event and through visiting verification. Unlike previous years, the level of verification activity has significantly reduced. This is a positive consequence of the bedding-in of the three Graded Units over the past few years. The majority of centres that have a history of offering the HNC/HND in Business adopted the revised awards within the first two years of their introduction. This combined with the success of centres at previous verification events has led to fewer centres being selected for external verification in 2009. In this session there was no Graded Unit 1 evidence selected for central verification, and a limited number of centres were asked to submit candidate evidence for Graded Unit 3. A small number of visits were made to verify Graded Unit 2 projects. The visits as last year were timed to coincide, where possible, with the completion of the first two stages of the project.

The evidence suggests that existing centres have largely adapted to the particular demands of the Graded Units. Centres that are new to Graded Units 2 and 3 still found it difficult to judge the standard that is required at SCQF level 8, but had made considerable efforts to apply areas of good practice that had been highlighted in previous internal assessment reports. This is perhaps to be expected as centres that have now been offering the revised awards for several years, often took a little time to adapt to the particular requirements of these Units and their associated level. It is expected that variations between centres will continue to be narrowed as centres gain confidence and experience. As noted in previous years, the time and effort expended by those staff involved in preparing candidates, in marking, and in the internal verification of the Graded Units, is to be commended.

Graded Unit 2 DE3V 35

It is difficult to make any inferences that can be rolled out to cover all Graded Unit provision because of the small number of centres that underwent external verification in 2009. It is, however, fair to conclude that the Graded Unit 2 project can be challenging for both students and the staff involved in delivery. This is applicable to centres new to the Unit and quite possibly for centres that have offered the Graded Unit 2 previously.

The choice of project topic has a determining influence on the likely success of the whole project. Also associated with success, was the extent to which candidates spent time and care in preparing the brief and plan. In short, a good topic and a well considered brief and plan often seemed to be good foundations upon which a good development and good evaluation could be built. On occasions the clarity, crispness and detail that tend to

characterise a good initial stage of the project was lacking, yet relatively high marks had still been awarded. Care needs to be taken in assessing whether the criteria for the additional marks have truly been met. It is also important that the awarding of marks is clear with the identification of marks awarded against the required sections of each component of the project, and clear identification of which criteria additional marks have been awarded against. It is particularly important that in marking each stage of the project, that consideration is given to whether an overview of the work suggests an A, B, or C grade, or 'Not Achieved', which can then be considered against the mark being awarded overall. This is not encouraging a prejudgment of the final mark, or suggesting that an overall mark is arrived at through a holistic judgment, but is rather a safety check to ensure that the standard of the work matches the final mark and associated grade.

Graded Unit 3 DE3W 35

As in 2008, all candidate evidence for Graded Unit 3 submitted in 2009 to the central verification event was successful. Again there were some differences between centres, and again it is expected that time and experience will help reduce those differences. Centres were not afraid to assess a candidate as having not passed the Unit; however in a small number of cases some of the higher marks awarded tended to be slightly over generous. Care needs to be exhibited in ensuring that marks are awarded for answering the questions set, rather than answers that stray from the question. Caution also needs to be applied to awarding marks where the candidate fails to justify the points that they are trying to make, or for lifting unsupported examples from the case study. Where questions ask for evaluation, analysis etc, care has to be taken not to over reward candidates who display knowledge but fail to sufficiently demonstrate these higher level skills. These issues were certainly not universal in the evidence submitted, but on occasions a single marker of the script would err on the generous side in a particular question. Inconsistencies also arose where multiple markers were used, each of whom marked specific questions. Consequently, one marker who deviated from a satisfactory marking scheme could cause an overall mark to be higher, causing a boosted grade. This highlights the importance for careful consideration, on an annual basis, of how marks are to be awarded and of developing a consistent approach, prior to marking taking place.

Advice on good practice and areas for further development

Good practice

As in previous years there has been evidence of good practice. This was witnessed both at the central verification event and during the visits. This included the adoption of double/cross marking and the use of subject specialists to mark specific areas of Graded Unit 3. This can be an effective method of marking, particularly where there are a large number of candidates. As a note of caution, and as previously mentioned, it is important to ensure that all members of a marking team understand the principles behind the awarding of marks and that they must use a single marking convention.

It is important that double marking is not seen as a replacement for internal verification. Double marking may be incorporated within the internal verification process, but it primarily addresses the approaches and procedures to marking, how differences of opinion are settled, etc. The application of internal verification procedures also brings the Graded Units into a framework of procedures that are applied in common with all other Units.

It is good practice to identify how final marks are arrived at after double marking has taken place. A short statement of the process of deciding upon an agreed mark is useful. Where there is a larger difference in marks for a question or for sections of the project, a brief note stating the logic behind the decision for the final mark adds to the transparency of the process. There were instances where such notes were provided and this is to be encouraged. In addition, there were notes on occasions where a mark was awarded and the marker felt that there was the need to record a brief justification. Such justifications are not regularly required but it can provide a useful insight where clarification is beneficial and a mark is genuinely felt to be merited. It is often possible to provide an answer from an unusual but justifiable perspective that may merit marks. However, care needs to be exercised that the practice does not extend to awarding marks for dubious points or for poor explanation where marks are not deserved.

There was some confusion regarding marking conventions with instances where multiple markers each used a different convention. Centres should avoid the combined use of ticks, marks, circles and numbers. It is obviously essential practice to indicate where marks have been awarded, and whether a mark has been awarded for a basic point or for development. In the projects it is important to record which criteria have been met for the awarding of additional marks and how many marks are awarded against those criteria. The use of different coloured pens for first and second markers may add to the clarity of the process. Such conventions help both internal and External Verifiers in checking that appropriate assessment judgments have been made.

It is encouraging that good practice was evidenced through external verification again this year. There was anecdotal evidence gathered through discussions to suggest that good practice is being widely implemented by centres that were not involved in this year's external verification process.

Further development

The main focus for the future is to continue to correctly apply the appropriate standard to each of the Graded Units. This will be assisted by continued implementation of good practice in each centre and dialogue between those involved in the delivery of the Graded Units. Discussion internally and between centres is vital in helping to avoid isolation and compartmentalisation, where a drift from the appropriate marking standards is most likely to occur.

In the project, candidates should be encouraged to set their work out in the format suggested in the assessment exemplar pack — making it easier for centres to mark, whilst at the same time helping candidates in checking that they have covered all aspects of each of the three stages. Continuing care needs to be taken to guide the candidates regarding their choice of an appropriate subject for the project. It is important that the topic is both of manageable proportions and also, where possible, not so narrow as to be entirely reliant on the goodwill of an individual or organisation.

Many of the areas that centres need to keep in mind are outlined in brief in this report, and in greater depth in the reports produced over the previous few years. Centres need to keep themselves abreast of the forthcoming changes to the revised HN Business framework (mandatory Units and Graded Units) which will be available to centres from August 2010.

The proposed changes do not alter the required standards at SCQF levels 7 and 8, but it is hoped they will enhance the manageability of the awards. Further information on these changes will form the focus for the HN Business Network event that will take place later in October.