

## **Moderation Feedback – Central - 2005**

**Business**

**Qualification area**

**Subject(s) and Level(s)  
included in this report**

**HNC Business Graded Unit**

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## General comments on moderation activity

Work from eight centres was moderated. This represents a 100% sample of all those delivering the Graded Unit in the HNC Business in session 2004-2005. Each centre submitted a maximum of 12 scripts. In some cases, this involved all candidates in the group. Where centres had more than 12 candidates, the responsibility for choosing which scripts to send was left to the centre. All except one centre had used the exemplar assessment in pack 1 in its entirety.

There were considerable contrasts in the work submitted. Overall the centres fell into two main groups each of four Colleges. One group submitted work which had been carefully and consistently marked. The centres concerned also included additional supporting information such as how internal moderation had been carried out. In these four cases, marking was fair but strict and in accordance with the standard indicated by the marking guidelines. It was clear that the centres had put considerable effort into the Graded Unit eg preparing a special answer booklet.

The other group was less strong. The overall standard of candidate work was not so high and marking was lenient. In some cases, in particular, the moderation team felt it was much too generous. It was less easy to work out how the centre had approached the task of marking the Graded Unit eg only one of the four submitted material made it clear that the scripts had been double marked. Two centres from this group were not accepted for moderation. In both cases, overall marks awarded were much higher than those given for similar answers in other centres. One of these centres had also used a modified version of the exemplar assessment paper which had not been prior moderated and was felt to be below the standard required.

It is not easy to suggest a convincing explanation for this marked difference between centres. It may be helpful, however, to gather information on how centres approached all aspects of the Graded Unit and see if this provides any clues. It is perhaps worth bearing in mind that this is the first time that central moderation has been carried out for HN Business. It is also the first time centres and candidates have had to deal with a long exam of this type. It is to be expected that there will be a period of adjustment and that some may adjust more quickly than others. Another important factor may be the new philosophy behind HNC Business. The QDT for the new course were concerned about the credibility of the old HNC Business Administration and anxious to ensure that the new award did reach the standard set out at SCQF level 7. This may increase the amount of adjustment centres have to make. It is possible, however, that the differences apparent here reflect differences which have been around for some time but have not surfaced previously.

## Specific issues identified

There were a number of significant issues. The main ones were:

1. Working to a common standard — it was clear that there were differences between centres on what is the appropriate standard. This applied to both the standard of work which candidates had produced and the way in which it was marked. The standard is set by the Unit specification and should be reflected in the demands of the examination and the marking guidelines. It is not easy in business subjects to produce a set of guidelines which covers every single eventuality and individual assessors will have to make their own judgements on how to interpret the guidelines. The evidence from moderation is that there has been considerable variation in interpretation so that a common standard has not emerged. It may be that, with experience, this will begin to happen.
2. Awarding of marks — this is related to 1 above. Some centres followed the marking scheme closely but others did not (eg instructions to award a maximum number in particular cases were ignored). In some cases, centres did not seem to have considered the general comments attached to the marking guidance for individual questions (eg that points should be supported by reasons). Marks were awarded for vague statements and for points which were a repeat of points previously made in response to the question.
3. Marking of scripts — practice of marking varied between centres. In most cases, there was a direct correspondence between ticks (or other script markings) and marks awarded. This was not always the case which makes it hard for Moderators — internal and external — to work out where marks have been awarded. Most centres appeared to operate a system of double marking but it was not always clear how differences between markers had been resolved.
4. Use of prior moderation — one centre made some amendments to the questions in the exemplar question paper although there were no corresponding changes in the marking guidelines. The changes had not been submitted for prior moderation. It was the opinion of the moderation team that these changes had the effect of making the paper easier and that, if they had been submitted for prior moderation they would not have been accepted. Where centres do wish to develop their own assessments, it is sensible to submit them for prior moderation beforehand.

## Feedback to centres

The Graded Unit is new and places demands on candidates and on staff which did not arise in the HNC Business Administration. It is important to bear in mind that these changes reflect the revised HN Design Principles adopted by the SQA. Changes like this do require a period of adjustment. In addition, central moderation for HN Units is also new and it can take time to become familiar with the new system.

The most striking aspect of central moderation was the difference between centres with respect to the standard of work produced by candidates, the way in which it was marked and the way in which the Graded Unit had been administered. The following summarises some aspects of good practice which were apparent.

- ◆ use of assessment checklists from the exemplar assessment pack to provide a summary of candidate performance
- ◆ use of a specially prepared examination booklet – with a table to show marks awarded for each part of each question
- ◆ an individual marks sheet for each candidate with space for comments on the answer to explain how the marks had been awarded — these did not always have many comments however (an alternative option was making notes on scripts)
- ◆ a tailored version of the exemplar marking scheme to clarify the way in which the centre has interpreted the marking for particular questions
- ◆ double marking of scripts and a clear indication of how this had been conducted (relatively few centres gave any indication of how many differences of opinion had been resolved eg through a tailored marking scheme)
- ◆ a sheet explaining how internal moderation had been conducted
- ◆ making sure that ticks on scripts corresponded to the mark awarded — which helps Moderators to judge whether marks have been appropriately awarded
- ◆ following the marking guidelines as closely as possible eg limiting marks as specified in them; not giving credit for vague statements (there were examples of marks being given for statements which were not correct).
- ◆ using an SQA exemplar instrument of assessment (prior moderation offers a safeguard to centres which wish to change this in any way).

Central moderation proceeded more smoothly for those centres which displayed several of the above.