Higher National and Graded Unit

Qualification Verification Summary Report 2017
English and Communication

Introduction

Titles/levels of units verified:

H7MB 34   Communication: Practical Skills
H7TK 34   Communication: Business Communication
F60A 34   Research Skills

Graded Units:

F6V7 34   Creative Industries: Media and Communication, Graded Unit 1
F6V8 35   Creative Industries: Media and Communication, Graded Unit 2

Visiting verification has confirmed that the two new servicing units, H7MB 34 and H7TK 34 are being confidently delivered in almost all centres, with SQA assessment support packs used as a useful reference source. Good practice was widely noted in the development of contextualised and interesting assessment material. Some centres have used the SQA prior verification service to have their assessments validated.

F60A 34 Research Skills is an older unit (2009), and often delivered in conjunction with, or as preparation for, an assignment such as a graded unit. Where the analytical research process has been considered in depth, delivery has been competent, with some purposeful integration.

The two graded units for Media and Communication were being delivered with expertise and attention to detail by well qualified staff. Work in this area was generally praised, with slight caveat where marking was felt to be over generous.

Category 2: Resources

Criterion 2.4: There must be evidence of initial and ongoing reviews of assessment environments; equipment; and reference, learning and assessment materials.

All centres were able to offer appropriate evidence of initial and regular reviews. The most recent unit specifications and assessment materials for H7TK 34 and H7MB 34 were in use in almost all centres visited.

Category 3: Candidate support

Criterion 3.2: Candidates' development needs and prior achievements (where appropriate) must be matched against the requirements of the award.

There was good evidence that learners were appropriately enrolled, with a level of skill that would allow them to undertake the relevant units successfully.

For graded units, access requirements were clearly set so that learners had the necessary skills to achieve.

Where additional support was required, all centres had procedures for identifying need and offering additional assistance on an individualised basis.

Criterion 3.3: Candidates must have scheduled contact with their assessor to review their progress and to revise their assessment plans accordingly.

All centres had systems for regular contact with assessors, and where learners were interviewed they spoke warmly of the level and quality of access to tutors.

Category 4: Internal assessment and verification

Criterion 4.2: Internal assessment and verification procedures must be implemented to ensure standardisation of assessment.

Assessment and internal verification systems were effective and well designed, often taking advantage of electronic systems to provide ready access to documentation and updates across several campuses.

For graded units, assessors and internal verifiers were working closely together and often cross-marking.

Criterion 4.3: Assessment instruments and methods and their selection and use must be valid, reliable, practicable, equitable and fair.

In delivery of H7TK 34 and H7MB 34, centres were either using SQA assessment support packs or assessments – usually vocationally contextualised – of their own. The prior verification service had been used to good effect in some cases.

A few centres were fully integrating Communication units with another from a vocational award, for example H7TK 34 with Creating a Culture of Customer Care (H1F0 34); and F60A 34 with graded unit 2 of the Business Award (a pilot). This was under review but felt to be effective for some learners. Partial integration with assignments from other units was often found, especially for Outcome 2 of H7TK 34 and H7MB 34.

Projects for graded units were well designed to provide a good range of options matched to the skills and specialisms of learners and assessors. There was satisfactory scope for creative and imaginative approaches. Some integration was observed between the illustrated oral presentation for stage 2 of graded units and Outcome 2 of DH49 34 Complex Oral Presentation. Where such integration is implemented, it is important that the centre is aware of the different expectations of the two units, and assesses each accordingly.

Criterion 4.4: Assessment evidence must be the candidate's own work, generated under SQA's required conditions.

All centres had policies in place to combat plagiarism and malpractice. Learners were fully briefed about the importance of authenticity. Most centres required them to sign an authenticity statement when handing in work and many used software, such as Turnitin, for sample checking, and also encouraged learners to run checks on their own work.

For graded units, regular contact between learners and assessors during the course of the project meant that plagiarism was low risk. In one centre, where there had been an issue about authenticity, this was quickly picked up on and action taken.

Criterion 4.6: Evidence of candidates' work must be accurately and consistently judged by assessors against SQA's requirements.

In nearly all centres, assessor judgements were consistent with SQA requirements. The assessment of Outcome 1 of H7TK 34 and H7MB 34 was usually supported by helpful marking schemes. The issue of over-assessment for this outcome, however, was raised more than once, and visiting verifiers continue to find assessments that require discrete identification of purpose and readership with detailed justification. Centres should note the relevant guidance point in the specification for H7MB 34 and H7TK 34: 'Evaluation should examine the effectiveness of the text in terms of meeting the needs of intended readers and purpose; these may be self-evident or could be identified for learners.'

For graded units, assessors were found to have established good internal consistency, although in a few cases marking was somewhat over generous.

Criterion 4.7: Candidate evidence must be retained in line with SQA requirements.

All centres had satisfactory retention policies and were able to provide evidence as required for visiting verification.

Criterion 4.9: Feedback from qualification verifiers must be disseminated to staff and used to inform assessment practice.

All centres were able to demonstrate systems for disseminating feedback from visiting verifiers and in some cases current assessment practice had been adjusted to take account of the recommendations of a previous QV report.

It is increasingly common for several assessors and internal verifiers to be present for the feedback session at the end of a visit to enable useful discussion of the findings, relevant questions and focus on good practice. SQA visiting verifiers welcome this.

Areas of good practice reported by qualification verifiers

H7MB 34   Communication: Practical Skills
H7TK 34   Business Communication
F60A 34   Research Skills

The following good practice was reported during session 2016–17:

♦ In some large, newly merged centres, praise was given for the extensive work carried out in reviewing and refreshing instruments of assessment, and for establishing effective systems of internal communication and dissemination of information.
♦ Review and revision has helped to ensure that Communication learning materials are fully current.
♦ Where units are delivered by servicing departments, good relationships with 'home' departments are in place, as well as wide spread commitment to relevance and contextualisation.
♦ Use of online master folders ensures staff in large centres have easy and instant access to materials.
♦ Written feedback/evaluation from learners is often encouraged.
♦ Video and or audio recording of oral presentations and meetings is retained in some centres. This is helpful for standardisation, internal and external verification.
♦ Where learners are in employment, material drawn directly from workplace activity can afford appropriate assessment evidence (e.g. a new employee induction presentation).
♦ An element of integration with other units in a vocational award can reduce the assessment burden in a way that is both meaningful and useful.
♦ There is widespread commitment to monitoring authenticity by retaining at least one early draft of written work.
♦ Sample answers and exemplar student responses are retained by some centres in master folders and available to assessors. This is helpful in supporting assessors in accuracy and consistency of judgement.

Specific areas for development

The following areas for development were reported during session 2016–17:

♦ Centres should ensure that assessments for Outcome 1 of Business Communication and Communication: Practical Skills units do not require discrete identification of purpose or intended reader (with reasoned justification) as part of the evidence requirements.
♦ Non-current specifications, assessment checklists and assessment material should not be retained in master folders. Where these were found, a thorough review and update was strongly recommended.
♦ Accuracy in written communication (spelling, grammar, punctuation etc.) should not be formally critiqued in outcomes where it is not part of the evidence requirement (e.g. Outcome 1 of H7TK 34 and H7MB 34).
♦ To support authenticity, it is recommended that at least one draft of written work be retained as well as the final document.
♦ It is recommended that a sample of assessment evidence for Outcome 3 of H7TK 34 and H7MB 34 be recorded either in audio or video format. This would support internal standardisation, as well as internal and external verification.

Areas of good practice reported by qualification verifiers

F6V7 34   Creative Industries: Media and Communication, Graded Unit 1
F6V8 35   Creative Industries: Media and Communication, Graded Unit 2

The following good practice was reported during session 2016–17:

♦ There was evidence of recent checks on the currency and validity of assessment instruments, with changes made in line with student feedback and visiting verification recommendation. This demonstrates professionalism in ongoing quality improvements.
♦ Learners are encouraged to develop a fully professional, industry-standard approach to graded unit projects.
♦ An independent, professional and cooperative approach is strongly encouraged in learners doing project work for graded units. Peer review and self-evaluation are useful developmental tools. In one centre, graded unit schedules are negotiated with candidates using Google Calendar, giving a sense of shared responsibility.
♦ There is frequent use of cross-marking to support standardisation and consistency.
♦ The inclusion of the grade descriptors in learner guidance material is helpful for candidate understanding of what is required to achieve excellence.
♦ Graded unit project exemplars are retained in some master folders to support assessors in consistency in assessment.

Specific areas for development

The following areas for development were reported during session 2016–17:

♦ Internal verification sampling reports for graded units should offer some detailed commentary, rather than mere ticked boxes.
♦ Where internal verification of graded units is carried out on a set sample, it is recommended that A, B and C grades should be included, including grade borderline candidates.
♦ Although not mandatory, it is useful to have project-specific marking checklists for stage 2 to provide clarity on expected evidence, both for candidates and for assessors.
♦ Instructions for planning should ensure that learners are aware of the minimum word count for written (or duration for spoken) evidence: 700 words (7 mins) for F6V7 34 and 1,000 words (10 mins) for F6V8 35.
♦ When choosing projects, it is recommended that learners are advised to select media in which they are most knowledgeable.
♦ Where the project focus for the graded unit is journalistic writing, centres might consider the value in encouraging candidates to present a range of articles for different outlets rather than one single piece. This is more likely to develop writing skills, reflect current journalism approaches and produce a strong portfolio.
♦ Where integrating graded unit assessment with Complex Oral Presentation Outcome 2, it is recommended that the assessor develops a specific checklist for the illustrated presentation (within the Developing stage) using terminology from the graded unit specification and grade descriptions to avoid over-assessing.
♦ Meetings with learners should be recorded in progress review sheets rather than in learner diaries.

- ♦ It is recommended that a plagiarism declaration accompany project work.
- ♦ Where visiting verification has commented on over generous marking, the retention of exemplars, especially of borderline achievement, will be useful in terms of establishing accuracy and consistency.