Higher National and Graded Unit

Qualification Verification Summary Report 2018
Business Management and Business Graded Unit

Introduction

The following units were selected for verification:

Business Management (Verification Group 254)

F84T 34   Managing People and Organisations SCQF level 7
F7J7 35   Business Culture and Strategy SCQF level 8
H7V4 34   Preparing to Start a Business SCQF level 7
H7V5 34   Preparing a Formal Business Plan SCQF level 7

Business Graded Unit (Verification Group 390)

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

None of the units selected are new and none have had significant revisions this session. Managing People and Organisations (F84T 34), and Business Graded Unit 2 (F8LE 35) have both had guidance relating to word counts amended. The majority of verification activity during the 2017–18 session was undertaken through visits, with the verification of F8LD 34 Business Graded Unit 1 being completed on a remote central basis.

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.

There has been little change from previous years regarding criterion 2.4. Centres have well-established systems in place to ensure ongoing reviews. Formal operational planning cycles are in use, the learning environment is systematically reviewed, and plans made to ensure that necessary changes are made. Individual staff continue to regularly add materials and update learning materials. Many of the materials are accessible via a VLE, which is now used in almost all centres. In most cases for units in VG 254, centres used the SQA-devised ASP. A small number of centres using the SQA-devised HN Enhancements combined assessments for Business Culture and Strategy/Behavioural Skills. Records of meetings which are part of the internal quality system provided further evidence on updating of materials.

For F8LE 35 centres used the ASP and often used the HN Enhancements checklist, which integrates the project with the Research Skills unit. Candidates commonly received the guidance sections from the ASP.

For the Business: Graded Unit 1 examination, centres selected assessments from the four ASPs available.

Category 3: Candidate support

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

Centres used different approaches when selecting candidates. Often centres interviewed potential candidates who had applied for the HNC/D. Some did this in groups and others individually. All centres held induction sessions for candidates, the format of which varied from centre to centre. All operated a system of dedicated pastoral care, usually with a student advisor/mentor. In some centres, there were regular timetabled guidance slots, often accompanied by mandatory face-to-face review sessions. There was generally very good support, with candidates being able to gain support and assistance outside class times on a highly flexible basis. Resourcing of support comes at a cost, and centres have recognised the benefits that come from that investment.

All centres provided specialist support services that could be accessed as required.

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

Centres timetabled formal slots for the units within VG 254 and 390. Assessors could be contacted outside class times, often by e-mail, but sometimes they were available at their staff base as well. The need for flexibility in contact is particularly important in the project and business plan-type units, where there is a strong emphasis on guidance and supervision.

In the project classes it was common to have scheduled meetings with individual candidates, while some had a less formal review process where progress was mapped as candidates worked during the class times. All candidates were provided with verbal feedback, and often with written feedback that varied in length and detail. Some of the guidance and feedback was excellent.

For the examination (Graded Unit 1), the centres continue to deliver the unit using scheduled class times, with the main focus being on exam technique and answering questions to develop the required candidate skills. There was a strong emphasis on using practice case studies and questions to help develop the skills required for the examination. Some also used a prelim paper to help candidates prepare for the examination.

Category 4: Internal assessment and verification

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

All centres provided an internal verification (IV) policy and completed IV records. Some of the records contained narrative, identifying points that had required some thought, or might need explanation or changing. Records often contained explicit actions for future implementation, along with timescales. There has been a shift towards using the IV process as a developmental tool to help improve delivery and assessment, in addition to being a quality checking process. This is an important development as it helps improve standardisation and to ensure that sound assessment decisions are being made. This is particularly important as centres often deliver at a number of different sites using different staff.

The assessment procedures for the units in VG 254 are long established and are generally well understood. Some centres allow candidates greater freedom in completing the business plan units than others, and that can be a concern if the candidates are allowed to 'drift'.

The assessment procedures for the two graded units are also well understood. All centres appeared to run the project (Graded Unit 2) across the year rather that over a single semester, or two out of three blocks. Many centres integrated Research Skills within the project, and provided dedicated time for the delivery of the content relating to Research Skills. Many are now taking a reflective look at candidate projects after marking all three stages to ensure that the correct grades are awarded.

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

Business Management 254
Centres used SQA-devised assessments and in a very small number of cases, a locally-devised version based on the SQA ASP. The assessment instruments were passed through a pre-delivery check which was recorded in an IV record. There were no records this session to indicate that there were problems with the SQA assessments, and they were accepted as being valid, reliable, equitable and fair. All centres had the up-to-date unit specification for each unit, and it is essential that staff continue to check each year as even minor changes can affect whether the correct assessment decisions are being made. Where candidates had justifiable cause, assessment conditions were adapted to meet those specific needs. All centres provided access to specialist support services and diagnostic tests when required.

Business Graded Unit 390
Centres used the SQA-devised assessments for both units. The assessment instruments passed through a pre-delivery check which was recorded in an IV record. There were no records indicating that there were any problems with the SQA-devised assessments, and they were accepted as being valid, reliable, equitable and fair. All centres had the up-to-date unit specification for each unit. Where candidates had justifiable cause, assessment conditions could be adapted to meet those with specific needs. Access to specialist support services and diagnostic tests were provided when required.

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

Centres provided a malpractice/plagiarism policy. In most cases, candidates had to sign an authenticity declaration, and details of malpractice and plagiarism was normally contained in information provided during induction. The use of Turnitin is now commonplace for units such as Managing People and Organisations, with some using it more for development, but others imposing percentage similarity requirements. There has generally been a big push towards requiring the use of formal referencing in candidate work. The nature of the candidate evidence for the project tends to reduce the opportunity for copying, but it is important that checks continue to be made, using questioning if required. Turnitin is increasingly being used to provide electronic feedback as well as being used as a mechanism to encourage candidates to submit work by the deadline set. This has been a big issue in the past, and the use of Turnitin to impose deadlines has good potential in helping manage this problem.

There were some instances where copying or poor referencing were identified by the centres and dealt with. In the business planning units, the nature of the candidate evidence tends to reduce the opportunity for copying. All evidence reviewed was generated under the conditions set by SQA for units within VG 254/390.

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

Business Management (VG 254)

Centres are familiar with the units and the assessments for the units within VG 254. Where work was judged to be deficient, candidates were asked to remediate the appropriate sections and evidence was re-assessed. The improved use of internal verification and standardisation meetings has helped ensure better identification and application of the relevant standards.

The two business planning units generated evidence that had less variation in quality than in years past, and this can be attributed to the structured management of the candidates and their work by the assessors.

Assessors provided feedback, sometimes on the scripts or using checklists, and a growing number used Turnitin to mark and provide feedback. Records of meetings suggest there is a growing recognition of the importance of IV and standardisation events/activity in arriving at sound and consistent assessment decisions.

Business Graded Unit (VG 390)

The projects reviewed during visits had marks indicated on the marking sheets, with additional marks identified against the criteria for which they can be gained. Identifying why additional marks have been awarded against the additional mark criteria is required. Some centres took pains to identify the individual basic minimum required marks needed, while others were less specific. For the additional marks, some markers were quite specific about where those marks were gained within the work, while other marks were awarded more generally, for a criterion such as 'the level of language' which was evident throughout the work.

There needs to be continuing care to ensure that the grades awarded are justified. In past years, there was some variation in marking in the projects, and centres need to continue to reflect on whether the marks and final grades are really justified. There was a definite move towards taking a reflective view on the appropriate grade once all three stages of the project were completed. This is to be encouraged as a good check on whether or not grades are justified, and the grading table in the specification and ASP should be used to help benchmark the decisions made.

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

During the 2017–18 session, all centres retained the candidate evidence and assessment records in line with SQA requirements. Many centres retain candidate evidence for longer than the minimum period set by SQA. All recognised the need for secure storage.

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

Centres demonstrated they have an effective process in place to ensure dissemination of feedback from external verification activity. At some centres this took place and was recorded in IV records or team meetings. Qualification Verification (QV) reports were commonly available in electronic format. In each case, there was provision within the IV system to nominate actions, with timescales, resulting from a QV event. One centre holds biannual meetings of staff across its different sites to assist in standardisation and the sharing of good practice.

Areas of good practice reported by qualification verifiers

The following good practice was reported during session 2017–18:

Business Management 254

♦ There has been a much greater use of the IV process to foster good practice and assist with standardisation, in addition to being used as a basic quality check.

♦ There were some excellent examples of detailed, high-quality feedback.

♦ Encouragement to use a recognised referencing system, combined with excellent referencing guidance. This has been further encouraged through the increasingly common use of Turnitin.

♦ Excellent online resources being provided via a VLE.

♦ Improved use of the IV system to help improve standardisation and develop good practice.

♦ The use of a 'quality type days', bringing staff together from across different sites.

♦ Using presentations for business proposals to develop 'pitching' skills.

Business Graded Unit 390

♦ Within the projects, there were examples of innovative formats for the skills audit. These included the use of online diagnostic type tests and components from personal development plans.

♦ There is a growing move to reflecting on appropriate grades for candidate evidence once all three stages of the projects have been completed.

♦ 3.3 There were several examples where the level of candidate support was cited as being excellent.

♦ 4.2 There were examples of double marking that were used to good effect in assisting in standardisation between assessors.

♦ 4.6 There is an increased use of marking and providing excellent feedback through Turnitin. In addition, Turnitin is being used to enforce assessment deadlines.

Specific areas for development

The following areas for development were reported during session 2017–18:

Business Management 254

♦ As in years past, care needs to be taken in the business planning units to prevent candidates from falling behind. Giving a degree of freedom to take responsibility for the candidates own learning has to be balanced with a structured and scheduled approach to delivery and assessment. Submission of parts of the business plan in chunks against a schedule helps reduce the risk of falling behind.

♦ Interim IV can provide a good progress check during the delivery of the business planning units.

Business Graded Unit 390

♦ There were cases where projects had a very general and broad-ranging title/topic. This makes it difficult to produce an interesting and relevant project. Candidates should ideally pick a specific issue relating to one or a small number of organisations, rather than 'The impact of Brexit on the Scottish Economy' type topics.