National Certificate and Higher National units

Qualification Verification Summary Report 2018
Counselling

Introduction

The following units were subject to external verification during the 2017–18 session:

National Certificate units

HF89 46   Substance Use and Misuse: An Introduction
H2XN 11   Counselling: An Introduction *[two centres delivering]*

During the session 2017–18, external verifiers visited two centres delivering two **National Certificate units** across a range of delivery modes and courses. Some courses were designed to articulate to the HNC Counselling or the COSCA (Counselling and Psychotherapy in Scotland) counselling course. Both centres met the full range of SQA quality assurance criteria, indicating a clear and accurate understanding of the requirements of the national standards at the appropriate level of the award. Both centres regularly reviewed and updated teaching and learning materials, and used the SQA exemplar assessment for H2XN 11. Moreover, both exhibited a standardised approach to delivery, assessment and internal verification. Centres were encouraged to use the SQA prior verification service if they had developed their own assessment. The level of skills demonstrated in both units was a true reflection of the national standards in the award and credited candidates with the appropriate National Certificate units.

Higher National units

F1EE 34   Counselling: Behavioural and Cognitive Counselling Theory *(2 centres delivering)*
F1ER 34   Counselling: Relationship-Centred Counselling Skills: Stage 1 of the Three-Stage Integrative Model
F1EK 34   Counselling: Group Counselling Skills
F1EL 34   Counselling: Humanistic Counselling Theory
F1EN 34   Counselling: Personal Development in a Counselling Skills Context
F1EP 34   Counselling: Psychodynamic Counselling Theory
F1ES 34   Counselling: Relationship-Centred Counselling Skills: Stage 2 of the Three-Stage Integrative Model
F1EJ 35   Counselling Supervision
HT6X 35   Counselling: Contemporary Cognitive and Behavioural Theory
H0C4 35   Counselling: Self-Evaluation for Counsellors

Two centres delivering seven level 7 and three level 8 **Higher National units** were externally verified. Both centres used the range of guidance documents and assessment support packs produced to support approved centres — or those coming forward for approval to deliver this new qualification — in meeting the quality assurance requirements of SQA and BACP (British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy). Assessment evidence met the full range of SQA quality assurance criteria, indicating a clear and accurate understanding of the requirements of the national standards at the appropriate level of the award. There was a standardised approach to delivery, assessment and internal verification in all centres. One centre was encouraged to deliver the new HND Counselling course, a reflection of improving standards of delivery. The level of skills demonstrated in both centres was a true reflection of the national standards in all awards and credited candidates with the appropriate Higher National units.

Higher National graded units

F1M4 34   Counselling: Graded Unit 1

External verifiers visited one centre delivering a **Higher National graded unit**. The centre met the full range of SQA quality assurance criteria, indicating a clear and accurate understanding of the requirements of the national standards at the appropriate level of the award. It showed a standardised approach to delivery, assessment and internal verification, and consistent marking of assessed evidence. The level of skills demonstrated was a true reflection of the national standards, and credited candidates with the appropriate Higher National graded unit.

Category 2: Resources

Criterion 2.1: Assessors and internal verifiers must be competent to assess and internally verify, in line with the requirements of the qualification.

All centres visited had appropriately qualified assessors and internal verifiers to deliver the Higher National (HN) award, and all were receiving appropriate CPD in line with the requirements of the qualification. All centre staff were fully qualified to assess and internally verify the HNC Counselling award. Some are currently undertaking the required practice hours to assess and internally verify the HND Counselling, in line with BACP requirements. Staff in all centres were aware of the specific BACP requirements in the delivery and assessment of HND Counselling; namely, that staff must be registered / accredited members of BACP and work within the current BACP Ethical Framework for Counselling Professions. Evidence of formal assessor qualifications and CPD activity was available, thereby confirming industrial currency in line with the assessment strategy requirements. Appropriate professional and vocational continuing professional development activities ensured that centre staff maintained currency.

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

All centres had effective ongoing reviews of the assessment environment(s), assessment procedures, equipment, learning resources and assessment materials for award delivery. Centres had spacious, well-equipped counselling rooms, pre-delivery checklists, standardisation minutes, and internal verifier reports, which reported the review of the assessment environment. In one centre, completed candidate evaluation forms and personal reflection for each unit provided valuable feedback. One centre was encouraged to deliver the new HND Counselling course.

Centres are aware of the updated Group Award Specification and the list of additional criteria that external verifiers must cover when undertaking approval / external verification visits for the HND Counselling. The HND embeds BACP's Certificate of Proficiency (CoP). Centres delivering HN units used the range of guidance documents and assessment support packs produced to support approved centres — or those coming forward for approval of this new qualification — in meeting quality assurance requirements of SQA and BACP.

Verifiers identified examples of good practice including class representatives discussing course issues with assessors and internal verifiers to resolve any matters that had arisen.

Category 3: Candidate support

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

All centres identified candidate prior achievements and development needs and matched them to the relevant qualification at application, interview and selection stages. Development needs were further identified through self-reflection exercises and discussion. To improve retention rates, one centre was considering an induction session that would ensure candidates' awareness of the course demands and requirements. Staff demonstrated good awareness of the need to provide alternative arrangements for candidates who required additional support due to personal circumstances, written and/or oral communication difficulties.

Good practice identified in one centre encouraged candidates to undertake the online *Introduction to Counselling* programme prior to applying for a place on the course.

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

All centres provided candidates with effective scheduled contact with their assessors, and showed that assessment planning and progress review occurred. Timetabled guidance with an allocated tutor, face-to-face and/or written feedback, signed and dated candidate-tracking sheets, reports and logbook entries confirmed that candidates had regular scheduled contact with their assessor to review progress. All centres had written recorded evidence of clear, supportive and encouraging discussions. In one centre, it was recommended that more detailed feedback be offered to candidates.

Category 4: Internal assessment and verification

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

In line with SQA requirements, all centres demonstrated robust internal quality assurance policies and procedures on assessment and verification. In all centres, regular recorded meetings with the assessor took place to discuss assessment decisions, candidate progress and review, ensuring effective levels of standardisation and learner support. Standardisation minutes in all centres confirmed that verifiers and assessors had regular discussions about candidate evidence. All centres evidenced clear marking schedules, constructive feedback and support in all candidate feedback on assessment decisions.

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

All centres used the most appropriate assessment instrument. A variety of assessment evidence was used, including presentations, written assignments, simulation with role-play, and observation. Where available, centres used SQA prior verification assessment instruments. In one centre, all the instruments of assessment for HNC Counselling had been prior verified. A few centres adapted an exemplar to suit the needs of their learners. All ensured a valid, equitable and fair assessment. In one centre, external verifiers recommended that some feedback records be more detailed.

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

All centres authenticated candidate evidence in line with SQA requirements using various methods: signed induction checklists, assessment checklists, direct observation of practice and self-reflection, feedback in mentoring sessions, handwritten scripts, candidate signposting of evidence, and signed candidate statements. Candidates' personal logs / activities journals provided good records of the continuity of their learning and authenticity of their work.

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

All centres recorded accurate and consistent assessment judgements against the assessment strategy and SQA requirements. Portfolios of candidate evidence, signed and dated candidate logbooks, tracking sheets, internal verifier reports, highlighted remediation, exemplar assessment and clear marking guidelines to aid standardisation ensured the integrity of the SQA qualification.

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

All centres retained candidate assessment evidence in line with SQA requirements and their data protection policy for the purposes of internal and external verification. All centres had retained a variety of checklists, reports, portfolios, minutes of meetings, and hard copies of personal journals in a locked cupboard.

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

All centres disseminated external verification reports to relevant staff and implemented the feedback given. All centres discussed and recorded the report at team meetings and agreed on the completion of any actions within an agreed timescale. Assessors were also present for the external verification verbal feedback session. One centre had clearly implemented all the recommendations made during a previous verification visit.

Areas of good practice reported by qualification verifiers

The following examples of good practice were reported during session 2017–18:

♦ Use of SQA prior verification of assessment services
♦ Use of a range of guidance documents and assessment support packs
♦ Class representatives discussing course issues with assessors and internal verifiers to resolve matters identified
♦ Candidates being asked to undertake the online *Introduction to Counselling* programme prior to applying for a place on the course

Specific areas for development

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

♦ Greater use of the SQA prior verification service if developing own assessment
♦ More detailed feedback to candidates