



Higher National and Vocational Qualifications Internal Assessment Report 2014 Environment

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:

F6V9 35 Countryside and Environmental Management Graded Unit 2

F3PY 35 Green Technology Graded Unit 2

General comments

Two visits were carried out in relation to Graded Units during the 2013–14 Academic year. Both verification exercises were carried out using the new approach to external verification and both resulted in a Significant Strengths decision.

Unit specifications, instruments of assessment and exemplification materials

The current Unit specifications were in use throughout. All of the assessors and internal verifiers involved in delivery of the Graded Units were highly experienced and had been involved in teaching/assessment over a number of years. Instruments of assessment had been prior verified by SQA — although individual campuses devised their own assessment scenarios for the project according to resource availability. All course materials had been subject to robust, effective and routinely applied, quality control procedures. Marking schemes were in use throughout and all projects had been second-marked. It was noted that consistency between markers could have been improved by using second markers drawn from other campuses involved in course delivery as opposed to both assessor and verifier being drawn from the delivering campus. Regular course team meetings and standardisation activities across the newly merged institution were also recommended.

Evidence Requirements

In general, with the proviso expressed at the end of the previous section, the External Verifier was in agreement with the marks and grades awarded to candidates for each of the Graded Units sampled.

Administration of assessments

Assessments verified were administered in line with the requirements of the Unit specification and SQA policies and procedures. There were no obvious barriers to achievement. The exemplification materials laid out clear guidelines to candidates regarding submission dates and how to approach the project task. All Unit materials were located within a master file.

General feedback

During one visit the need for standardisation of assessment decisions between campuses delivering the award was discussed. The centre agreed with the verifier's assessment of the situation and agreed the need for action. A recommendation for a return visit at the end of the next academic year was made

to SQA. Otherwise, both Units represent vocationally important courses delivered by dedicated teams. Overall, the external verification visits were satisfactory.

Areas of good practice

Verifier feedback regarding good practice is included below.

- ◆ The course assessors provided timely, helpful and comprehensive candidate feedback
- ◆ Record keeping was exemplary throughout
- ◆ The instrument of assessment had been prior verified by SQA
- ◆ Interesting and imaginative scenarios employing the campus estate had been selected by all of the candidates for the case study
- ◆ Excellent and timely feedback was supplied to candidates during delivery
- ◆ Turnitin anti-plagiarism software is routinely applied to candidate submissions
- ◆ The centre had dealt with any queries/issues relating to the qualification in a prompt and appropriate manner

Specific areas for improvement

The issue of the need for standardisation of assessment (marking) is outlined below:

- ◆ There is a need to apply assessment and verification procedures consistently across all campuses delivering the award not simply within campuses.
- ◆ The External Verifier was not entirely convinced of the standardisation of assessment decisions reached by the two campuses sampled. All projects had been second-marked within campuses but not across campuses.

SVQ awards

General comment

SVQ Level 2 in Environmental Conservation (GG6M 22)

A total of two external verification visits carried out this year. These were carried out under the new approach system of external verification. Both external verification visits were successful and Significant Strengths were recorded at each. Provision was generally of a high or very high quality and the award continues to produce candidates who are ready to move directly into employment.

Unit specifications, instruments of assessment and exemplification materials

All assessors and internal verifiers had been selected on the basis of experience and local knowledge.

Assessors and internal verifiers were either fully qualified having achieved the relevant A or V Units or were working towards these.

The Assessment Strategy was in general use, was current/available and was used to inform course delivery. Centres were rigorous in following the requirements of the Assessment Strategy and all instruments of assessment had been devised accordingly.

Evidence Requirements

The centres demonstrated a clear understanding of the Evidence Requirements for the award. Candidate portfolios were clear and self-explanatory.

Administration of assessments

Internal verification was evident throughout the assessment process as an ongoing activity. Centres have generally devised very effective internal verification procedures in accordance with the Assessment Strategy. Ongoing assessments were conducted in excellent real work environments (RWE) at both centres visited. Assessors used every opportunity to exploit naturally occurring assessment scenarios and assessment was well integrated across the award. Records of assessment/candidate evidence were retained in accordance with SQA policies and procedures.

General feedback

The re-validation of this SVQ award this academic year was welcomed by both centres.

Provision was generally of a high or very high quality and candidates emerged from a period of training ready for employment in the rural industry sector. Footpath repair and construction remains the primary practical focus for the award.

Areas of good practice

Good practice recorded by the external verification team is included, in full, below:

- ◆ The centre shows a clear commitment to continuing professional development for all staff
- ◆ Assessor/verifier commentary/feedback flagged-up the need for candidates to use a range of evidence types when compiling their portfolios
- ◆ Record keeping was seen to be exemplary
- ◆ The centre operates a robust and effective quality assurance procedure — this was followed throughout course delivery
- ◆ The partnership approach to delivery, assessment and internal verification of the award between the two assessor/verifiers, and supported by the CEO (also assessor/verifier), allows for continuous standardisation activities as the staff work closely together and closely with candidates
- ◆ Making previous candidate portfolios freely available during the EV visit, without any request being put forward
- ◆ Developed log sheets — particularly the sections and grid, used to highlight evidence pertinent to specific Units
- ◆ Added value through additional training outwith requirements of the SVQ award
- ◆ Use of LANTRA support materials with students to provide a wider breadth of knowledge and understanding, outwith the upland setting usually being worked in
- ◆ Provision of a high quality, clear and detailed trainee handbook
- ◆ Ongoing review of delivery and assessment methods
- ◆ Real-life working environment for training and assessment
- ◆ Holistic approach to assessment

Specific areas for improvement

No specific areas for improvement were identified at centres during the external verification process.