



Higher National and Vocational Qualifications Internal Assessment Report 2015 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 Units

General comments

Verification visits took place this academic year in relation to DN37 34: Ecology and Ecosystems and DN62 34: Managing Sites for Biodiversity.

Also DP4X 35: Terrestrial Ecosystems and DV0N 35: Plan an Environmental Management System. This was a successful external verification visit to a competent and effective centre.

Unit specifications, instruments of assessment and exemplification materials

The Units were delivered, assessed and verified entirely in compliance with the requirements of the Unit specifications. Assessors and verifiers had a good understanding of the Unit requirements.

Evidence Requirements

Generally, the centres verified had a good grasp of the Evidence Requirements for the above Units.

Administration of assessments

Generally, with the exception of the issue identified in the next paragraph, instruments of assessment were both valid and reliable. SQA exemplars were used when available. Additionally produced, closed-book papers had been prior verified by SQA. New assessments were internally verified in advance of prior verification with SQA. Evidence of candidates' work was accurately and consistently judged by assessors against SQA's requirements. Overall, internal verification was robust and effective. Documented records were maintained of the internal assessment /verification procedures. Candidate evidence was retained and stored in accordance with SQA requirements.

In a visit where DN37 34 and DN62 34 were verified, DN37 34 had insufficient evidence that assessments for Outcomes 2 and 3 had been prior verified, in line with the internal verification process. No formal assessment sheet covering the requirements of Outcomes 1 and 2 was available. There was no corresponding pre-use verification form available. The sanction was: 'Internally verified, formal assessment documents need to be produced for Outcomes 2 and 3'. The assessment for Outcome 2 should follow the form of the recommended checklist identified in the Unit specification. To reduce the assessment burden on students, a single investigation report should be requested for Outcome 3.

General feedback

Candidate feedback was both timely and effective. Access to assessment was fair and equitable and there were no obvious barriers to achievement.

Areas of good practice

- ◆ Maintenance of ongoing CPD record for all staff involved in the assessment and verification of the Units
- ◆ Partnership with a university allowing access to library and lab facilities allows candidates access to a level of resources which would not be possible for the centre alone
- ◆ Accommodating known cultural requirements whilst studying at the centre; ensuring provision of separate academic and pastoral support for all candidates; provision of an open forum in which all concerns can be aired — these are all paramount for supporting overseas students
- ◆ The internal verification of all candidate submissions — allowed by small numbers in the candidate cohort
- ◆ The monthly meetings between the internal verifier, assessor and all those involved in the delivery of DV0N 35 are excellent to see and help to ensure a coherent approach to the delivery and assessment of the Unit and standardisation of approaches and levels
- ◆ The proactive, supportive and developmental role adopted by the internal verifier
- ◆ The use of online, accessible CPD logs and staff engagement with CPD activities and this system
- ◆ The feedback and guidance given against the submissions for DN62 34 was excellent and provided clear, constructive and positive approaches to improve the work and ensure that the holistic report submitted by candidates will meet all of the Unit requirements

Specific areas for improvement

- ◆ Give consideration to those involved in assessment and internal verification to take the HN Units in assessment and internal verification for non-work-based settings
- ◆ Include a summative checklist for each Unit to show overall achievement and highlight any areas of concern or missing achievements
- ◆ All assessors should be encouraged to physically mark candidate work as a means of providing direct and clear feedback. This occurs well for DN62 34, but is lacking in DN37 34, where feedback is restricted to very brief comments entered on a marking grid
- ◆ The assessment for DN37 34, Outcome 2 should follow the form of the recommended checklist identified in the Unit specification. To reduce the assessment burden on students, a single investigation report should be requested for DN37 34, Outcome 3

Higher National Graded Units

Titles/levels of HN Graded Units verified:

F3R0 35: Green Technology Graded Unit 3

F6VA 35: Environmental Management and Sustainability Graded Unit 3

General comments

Two Units were scrutinised — both examinations. An issue was identified in relation to F6VA 35: Environmental Management and Sustainability, namely: marking/grading appears to have been carried by a single (unidentified) individual. There was no evidence of second marking or internal quality control. There was no perceivable audit trail. The campus appears to be in conflict with the centre's own internal verification procedures.

Unit specifications, instruments of assessment and exemplification materials

The Graded project-based Units remain fit for purpose but it was agreed in the Decision Log (04/11/2014 Verification Group Meeting minutes) that marking/grading criteria be brought into line with the revised HN Applied Sciences Graded Unit (Project/Investigation) criteria.

The problem identified with F6VA 35 — Environmental Management and Sustainability (exam) has its roots in the assessment specification in the Unit specification. The first two sections each comprising two questions (choice of two questions from four) representing 35% of the total mark presents a challenging task for the marker or the designer of the marking scheme, and gives rise to half, third and quarter marks at final grading. The choice of essay question (marked out of 30%) is acceptable.

It has been suggested that the Unit specification, assessment criteria be amended and SQA is currently considering this option.

Evidence Requirements

All evidence relating to the two Units under scrutiny were made available to the SQA External Verifier. Generally the Evidence Requirements for the Units were met and the associated gradings were fair although additional evidence is awaited in one case. These were closed-book, invigilated, examinations — there were no issues relating to authenticity.

Administration of assessments

Evidence was presented in a clear and unambiguous manner and was easily cross-referenced. Evidence was retained in accordance with SQA requirements.

General feedback

Given that these were invigilated closed-book examinations, the need for candidate feedback is limited. That said, overall candidate feedback was minimal and, in the case where issues arose, non-existent. There is room for improvement in this area.

Specific areas for improvement

The agreed actions in relation to the Hold on certification were: exam scripts — F6VA 35 — must be second-marked and if necessary re-graded by the centre's internal verification team. Assessors/verifiers should sign-off final grades. Satisfactory evidence would consist of a final summary sheet for all centre candidates showing assessor /verifier decisions and agreed final grades.

SVQ awards

General comments

A single verification visit was made in relation to the SVQ Level 2 in Environmental Conservation G70H 22. The following Units were verified:

H466 04: Monitor and Maintain Health, Safety and Security
H45M 04: Establish and Maintain Working Relationships with Others
H45L 04: Develop an Awareness of Environmental Good Practice
H46P 04: Promote Responsible Use of Outdoor Sites
H45D 04: Construct Paths or Surfaces
H464 04: Maintain or Repair Paths or Surfaces
H45N 04: Establish and Manage Habitats

The centre had a good grasp of the national standards and the visit resulted in a successful Accepted decision.

The centre used the context of footpath, construction and maintenance, for course delivery.

Unit specifications, instruments of assessment and exemplification materials

The centre has developed instruments of assessment and exemplification materials in accordance with centre priorities and candidate needs. These are valid and reliable and allow candidates to demonstrate competence in the NOS for the award. Centre staff are experienced, proficient and fully familiar with the relevant National Occupational Standards.

Evidence Requirements

The assessors and verifiers verified during the external verification visits were fully qualified in assessment and/or verification and were fully compliant with the requirements of the LANTRA Assessment Strategy. Assessment /verification decisions were clearly recorded on centre documentation throughout.

Administration of assessments

No issues were identified with the overall quality of candidate submissions, indeed these tended to be of a high or very high quality. All assessment decisions were accurately and consistently made across all candidates against SQA requirements and the requirements of the Unit specifications.

There was satisfactory evidence that internal verification was taking place on completed candidate submissions. This was robust and effective. The centre takes steps to review — internally verify — their core course materials on a regular basis. Again this is excellent.

General feedback

Candidate support was of a high or very high standard throughout.

Areas of good practice

- ◆ Close working, as part of a small team, has allowed for reflection, review and enhancement of paperwork and portfolio evidence as an ongoing process throughout the delivery of the SVQ
- ◆ Putting candidates through additional health and safety training in support of their places of work and training. This approach forms an excellent basis/model for the development of an MA framework
- ◆ Giving candidates increased responsibility for project development, delivery and health and safety throughout the project has helped demonstrate their development and progression — from supported, pre-existing documentation in site safety files, to producing and delivering their own projects towards the end of the course
- ◆ Assessors working closely together with the candidate group enabled informal, ongoing standardisation activities to take place throughout the delivery of the training programme. This is invaluable in maintaining consistency in assessment decisions
- ◆ Friendly, open and honest attitude towards EV at all points, prior to and during the visit
- ◆ Excellent to see a holistic approach being taken to portfolio development, where there is clear integration of Units into the reporting provided by log sheet completion and a range of evidence types generated through real working activities

Specific areas for improvement

- ◆ All candidates should sign and date the declaration of authenticity on completion of their portfolios, rather than part way through
- ◆ Ensure that internal verification activities are formally built into the delivery and assessment planning for any future delivery of this SVQ, to avoid end loading of any of these activities
- ◆ Build in ongoing review meetings/time for assessors and internal verifiers to meet periodically throughout the delivery of the SVQ as a means of ongoing standardisation and to avoid any issues at the end of the programme where time might not be available to address any identified issues.