



Higher National Qualifications Internal Assessment Report 2016 Information Technology

The purpose of this report is to provide feedback to centres on verification in Higher National Qualifications in this subject.

Higher National units

General comments

In visiting verification all centres demonstrated significant strengths. It would appear that centres have a good working knowledge of SQA quality assurance and in most centres there are robust and clear internal systems which are adhered to.

Merged centres appear to be adopting a common approach although there are still some centres that are working towards standardised systems.

Verifiers reported that there was a good level of candidate support in place and that candidates receive a good level of assessment feedback.

Overall, verifiers were satisfied that evidence presented met all the criteria.

Unit specifications, instruments of assessment and exemplification materials

Evidence shows that centres demonstrate a good understanding of national standards as defined within unit specifications. Where there is doubt many centres seek clarification through the qualifications team who redirect queries to the verifiers. This appears to work well.

The majority of assessment carried out makes use of SQA-produced exemplars with some modifications to contextualise the assessment; this is particularly the case with the use of different programming languages. Assessment support packs exist for core units within the award and for a range of other subjects. Where no pack exists centres have developed assessment and have used SQA assessments for guidance.

There are few instances where centre-devised assessment is sent for prior verification; verifiers encourage this at their visits.

Evidence requirements

Evidence requirements for the HN Information Technology units are generally well understood. Assessment was, on the whole, valid, reliable, practicable and fair. All assessment tasks were relevant and at an appropriate level to both meet the evidence requirements and to provide sufficient challenge to candidates.

Assessments are contextualised and in keeping with current industry practice. In some instances integration of assessment is evident which can provide a better assessment experience for candidates.

Administration of assessments

Centres are demonstrating robust and well documented assessment and internal verification procedures. In some of the merged colleges quality procedures are

still being developed. In some centres these have not been fully implemented with some of the partners still working to their previous systems.

All centres have adopted the three-stage verification process and evidence would suggest that this is well understood and implemented by internal verifiers and assessors.

A good level of digital evidence was presented to verifiers. This was available on network drives, VLEs and also on USB devices. Verifiers are happy to look at this evidence and would encourage more use of digital evidence.

There is strong evidence to suggest that VLEs are being well used for administration of assessment. This provides a centralised focus for assessment, and feedback. Centres also make use of authentication tools.

General feedback

Centres all adopt a candidate-first focus and there is strong evidence to suggest that candidates are well prepared for assessment. Candidates interviewed during visits confirmed that they felt that the assessments were fair and that they were given good feedback for assessment regardless of whether they had to remediate.

The level of support for candidates, reported by external verifiers, is good. The needs of all candidates are met and alternative assessment procedures are put in place as required.

Areas of good practice

Good practice falls into two main areas. The first area centres around the use of electronic evidence while the other main area of good practice identified was in standardisation and sharing of practice.

- ◆ The standard of feedback in units verified was extremely high with constructive and comprehensive comments to support candidates.
- ◆ The use of electronic portfolios and in particular the use of Moodle for issuing and managing assessment submission and feedback through Gradebook was extremely effective for both candidates and staff.
- ◆ Good use was made of Moodle for assessment completion and submission.
- ◆ Turnitin was being used to verify software case studies and programmes. Assessors indicated that it was useful in cases where the similarity in the report was in the high 90s but that the threshold was needed to be set high because of the nature of the submission.
- ◆ Staff delivering Oracle participate in Plan C, Glasgow University's Professional Learning Network for Computing Teachers. Active participation in Plan C, provides networking and cross-fertilisation of best practice in the subject area.
- ◆ Prospective candidates are given access to a dummy enrolment account to preview teaching and learning materials and Oracle virtual learning

environment, prior to registering for Oracle Academy and associated HN units.

- ◆ Candidates can choose (within timetable constraints) when to sit summative assessments. This allows the candidates to do effective workload planning and time management.
- ◆ Cross-referencing of internal verification practices with other campuses, promoting sharing of best practice.
- ◆ Cross-assessment of topics between related units/modules improved contextualisation and integration of knowledge and application of skills and reduced candidates' overall assessment loading.
- ◆ Cross-referencing of assessment practices with other campuses, promotes sharing of best practice and standardisation of assessment and assessors' judgements.
- ◆ The production of a flowchart of the internal verification process and procedures made access to this area very clear and unambiguous.

Specific areas for improvement

Some areas for improvement were identified during visits. These are not necessarily applicable to all centres as many centres have systems in place to address these. It is recommended that:

- ◆ centres adopt an appropriate plagiarism detection/formative feedback and originality checking system, eg Turnitin, for all major assessment documents/assignment reports
- ◆ a standardised approach and format is devised to providing feedback comments on candidates' assessment documents and consistently applied to all candidates' assessment scripts/reports
- ◆ centres provide a single centralised access point for candidates to access assessment results and feedback, and schedules of assessment deadlines

Higher National graded units

Titles/levels of HN graded units verified:

H48X35 Computing: Technical Support: Graded Unit 2

H48V35 Computing: Networking: Graded Unit 2

H1J8 34 Computing: Graded Unit 1

F21G 34 Interactive Media: Graded Unit 1

General comments

Graded units were both project based and examination based. Visiting verification took place during May and June while examinations were centrally verified in early June.

For project-based graded units, verifiers were satisfied that centres have a good understanding of the requirements of graded unit projects and that this was evidenced by a considerable amount of good, and in many cases innovative, practice being demonstrated.

In most cases evidence was examined for stages 1 and 2 although there was some evidence of the evaluation stage 3 being carried out.

Verifiers and centre staff have engaged in dialogue to improve the delivery and assessment of graded units.

A small number of graded units were selected for central verification. There were some issues that were identified with these. Training for centres will be offered during session 2016–17.

Unit specifications, instruments of assessment and exemplification materials

Centres have a good understanding of the unit specifications and this was demonstrated during visits.

The graded units that were verified by a visit were all supported by SQA-produced assessment support packs. These were generally adapted to expand and contextualise the marking schemes. Centres developed further briefs to give candidates a choice of project topic and in many cases candidates were encouraged to find their own project.

For graded unit examinations, centres made use of SQA-produced exemplars but there were some centres that did not make use of the most up to date versions of these. There was also an instance where a centre had devised their own examination by selecting questions from exemplars. This is not considered appropriate practice.

Evidence requirements

Evidence suggested that evidence requirements were well understood. Marking schemes were developed which met the evidence requirements while allowing accurate and fair marks to be awarded.

Administration of assessments

Assessment of graded units is a prolonged and sequential process. The collation, feedback and marking was robust and fair. Most centres made use of VLEs for assessing graded units and in particular use of authentication software.

There was evidence that feedback to candidates was extensive and robust in most cases which gave candidates an opportunity to use feedback from one stage to inform the next stage.

There was evidence that centres are administering the graded unit exams digitally. This is an appropriate method of assessment and it was noted that in all instances candidates were given the choice of producing an electronic or hand written response.

General feedback

Centres have adequate resources to support candidates through all stages of the graded unit. Assessors adopt a supportive facilitation role for graded units and this works well with candidates being very aware of what is required of them and when.

Verification is carried out well on project-based graded units with all centres ensuring that this is prioritised. In most cases verification is carried out on a stage-by-stage process. This is often via cross-marking.

Graded unit examinations were, in all cases, cross-marked and where there were discrepancies identified between markers these had been resolved. When selected for central verification centres do not necessarily send all information such as internal verification records. This can make it difficult to carry out a remote verification if information is not provided.

Areas of good practice

While centres are doing a good job, there were no specific areas identified to highlight this year.

Specific areas for improvement

A number of areas were identified where there was scope for improvement.

- ◆ Centres must ensure that only current versions of ASPs that are on the secure site are used.
- ◆ Centres should send any locally devised graded unit assessment to SQA for prior verification, preferably in autumn to ensure it is ready for delivery.

- ◆ If a locally devised assessment is going to be used, the mark allocation can take into account professional judgement. The allocation of marks and grading criteria stated in the unit specification must be applied though. Marks awarded for each evidence requirement should be based on the relevant grading.
- ◆ Marking schemes should be annotated and or expanded to clearly show how marks will be allocated within a centre.
- ◆ It would be helpful if markers clearly show where marks are being allocated on candidate scripts.
- ◆ Centres should standardise the method of marking and internal verification and carry out pre-exam standardisation to agree which answers are deemed acceptable.
- ◆ Centres are recommended to carry out cross-campus marking and internal verification.
- ◆ Pre-delivery checklists should be dated when they are completed.
- ◆ Try to internally verify stage 1 after it has been marked to capture any problems before candidates do substantial work for stage 2.
- ◆ Should remediation ever occur, centres should retain a copy of the original and revised version of evidence.
- ◆ Assessors and internal verifiers are encouraged to use professional judgement in marking. ASPs give marking allocations which are provided for guidance and these can be altered to better suit candidates' projects.
- ◆ It would be helpful if centres considered having a signed invigilator incident report which confirms the conditions of the exam and any incidents such as phones going off during the exam.
- ◆ Where appropriate, it would be helpful if centres provided information regarding alternative assessment arrangements.
- ◆ Candidates must have scheduled contact with their assessor to review their progress and to revise their assessment plans accordingly.