



**Higher National Qualifications and Graded Units**

**Qualification Verification Summary Report 2019**

**English and Communication**

**VG 1**

## Introduction

Five SQA external verifiers conducted verification visits to 18 centres within this verification group. Visits covered a range of units including HN Communication servicing units, Graded Units and HN Media and Communication units. In addition, there were several visits focusing on level 6 NC units, so these are featured in this report for the first time in recent years. Several schools are delivering these units for the first time, and this number is expected to grow.

Where comments refer to specific units, these are noted within each criterion. The sections on good practice and areas for development are sub-divided according to units.

The units verified (and occurrences) were:

H7TK 34	Communication: Business Communication (4)
H7MB 34	Communication: Practical Skills (5)
F60A 34	Research Skills (4)
F6V8 35	Creative Industries: Media and Communication Graded Unit 2 (1)
F26M 34	Creative Industries: Professional Writing Skills: Graded Unit 1 (1)
DH49 34	Complex Oral Presentation (1)
F1WK 34	English Language Skills: Correcting Creative Text (2)
F607 34	The Media: Features and Trends (2)
F69K 34	Writing for the Media (1)
FA1W 12	Communication (NC) SCQF Level 6 (8)
FA58 12	Literature 1 (9)

## **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.**

All centres provided adequate evidence that they had robust systems for ongoing review of assessment environments; equipment; and reference, learning and assessment materials.

Evidence was mostly to be found in different documents, and identifying relevant pieces of information was sometimes time-consuming for external verifiers. Quality manuals were sometimes presented as a single paper document. Otherwise, the documents were available via online systems such as SharePoint drives, MS OneNote or intranet systems.

## **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 had systems in place to match candidates to their awards.

Colleges and training centres either used their own locally-devised diagnostic tests or considered previously-attained qualifications and/or occupational experience. For HN servicing units in colleges, assessors tended to have limited control over student recruitment and the disparity that sometimes exists between specialist subject knowledge/occupational experience and ability in written communication skills was acknowledged in many instances. There was ample evidence that HN Creative Industries courses were setting appropriate entry levels, usually two Highers, but with additional portfolio requirements for Creative Industries: Professional Writing Skills.

Schools used records of prior achievements to direct pupils to FA1W 12 and FA58 12 in S5 as an alternative to the study of Higher English. Some planned to give learners the option to progress to Higher English in S6. Colleges delivered these level 6 NC Communication units to a wide range of groups, with a concentrated delivery within SWAP groups to achieve Higher English equivalence for progression to university level study.

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

All centres effectively ensured meaningful scheduled contact with learners, initially through timetabled classes and one-to-one meetings. Written feedback from assessors to candidates was almost always detailed and constructive, and therefore valuable to candidates when re-assessment was required. In a small number of cases the language used was vague or emotive.

A small number of centres are experimenting with innovative practices such as recording feedback conversations between assessor and learner, and sharing the recordings with the learners via Moodle. In one centre, candidates are able to reflect on their learning and gain

deeper knowledge of their learning 'journey' via an engaging blog created by their assessor. The blog not only provides candidates with an opportunity to reflect on and develop their knowledge and skills, but also allows the assessor to provide an overview of learning and build a very cohesive group ethos.

## **Category 4: Internal assessment and verification**

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

Almost all centres use fixed internal verification calendars to ensure that activity is well planned in advance. Where there are new staff or new assessments, additional scrutiny measures (eg increasing the sample size) are applied to ensure effective standardisation. However, in a few cases, although internal verification procedures appeared to be thorough, they were not fully implemented as planned. In a small number of cases, internal verifiers had overlooked errors such as using out of date checklists or failing to check word counts.

In almost all colleges, systems were robust and effectively covered activities across multiple campuses. However, in very few cases, practices and standards still varied between campuses and departments resulting in further recommendations or required actions.

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

In almost all centres, Communication servicing units (H7TK 34 and H7MB 34) were being assessed with vocationally contextualised assessment tasks suitable for SCQF level 7. A small number of non-conformance issues were identified:

- ◆ The same assessments and assessment checklists were used for both H7MB 34 and H7TK 34, resulting in some invalid approaches and over-assessment of H7MB 34.
- ◆ The inclusion of separate questions on purpose and target reader/audience for Outcome 1 reading tasks resulted in some over-assessment.
- ◆ Assessment checklists, usually from older versions of units, where the wording did not match the evidence requirements were in use in a few cases.
- ◆ The absence of marking schemes (or exemplars) for Outcome 1 reading assessments undermined consistency.
- ◆ Word counts for Outcome 1 evaluation and Outcome 2 written assessments were not always met.

In all centres visited, assessments for F60A 34 Research Skills were valid, reliable, practicable, equitable and fair. In some centres, the assessment was fully integrated with Business graded units, and checklists tracked where the Research Skills evidence could be found to demonstrate that it had been completed satisfactorily.

HN Creative Industries units (including the graded unit) used high-quality assessment instruments that met the needs of their candidates in almost all cases. For a very small number of assessments, assessors were reminded of the importance of strictly adhering to unit specifications.

For the SCQF level 6 FA1W 12 and FA58 12 units, the SQA Assessment Support Pack was widely used for assessment or as a template for centre-devised assessments. Only a few centres were not aware that it was available.

In almost all centres, for FA1W 12 contextualised and topical texts were in use for Outcome 1 Reading assessments with questions clearly linked to performance criteria. In cases where Higher English examination materials had been used, these had been correctly adapted to meet the FA1W 12 performance criteria. For the FA58 12 Literature 1 unit, texts were at an appropriate standard — some of these texts were included in the Higher English Scottish Text list. As the study of literature in FA58 12 is set at the same level as in Higher English, this can be good practice.

A few centres did not adapt the questions to match FA58 12 performance criteria or used cut-off scores. Where centres delivered both units within the same programme, there was evidence of effective integration in almost all instances. One centre, however, had attempted to integrate the units with Higher ESOL tasks, and the resulting evidence did not meet the required standards.

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

In all centres, assessors kept early drafts of candidates' work as evidence of authenticity. The use of signed authenticity declarations is widespread and where assessments are submitted via a VLE, there were built-in authenticity agreements. There is a growing use of plagiarism detection software, with some centres using Turnitin, SafeAssign or URKUND.

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

For almost all units that were externally verified, assessments were being accurately and consistently judged against SQA requirements. There were a few cases where improvements were suggested or required.

Assessment checklists for Outcome 3 of H7MB 34 and H7TK 34 were sometimes vague and lacking detail with little or no other supporting evidence, resulting in insufficient evidence of candidate achievement.

When Research Skills was integrated with the Business graded unit, the evidence was not always explicit or fully identifiable. Assessors were asked to ensure clearer signposting of evidence to support more effective internal and external verification.

For Graded Unit F6V8 35, assessors should note that when assessing the media product at Stage 2 assessors should only be allocating 30 plus marks to final products that are close to a

professional standard. Marks for the records of activities should reflect the considerable volume of work and time dedicated to perfecting their product.

Only a small number of centres retained video evidence to support verification of Outcome 4 of FA1W 12. Although audio or video recordings are not mandatory, such recordings can be a useful resource for standardisation of assessment.

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

All centres retained candidate evidence as required by SQA for internal and external verification. Some centres kept evidence for much longer periods of time than required — up to three years after candidate completion.

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

All centres had effective systems in place to ensure that external verification reports were shared with appropriate staff. Almost all were able to provide evidence of minutes of meetings where findings had been discussed, or pre-delivery checklists showing where suggestions had been taken on board. However, a few centres failed to demonstrate how the reports were used to inform future assessment practice and highlight areas for improvement.

In one case, a centre repeated a non-conformance identified in the previous external verification report, as information had not been effectively shared with assessors working in a different team.

## **Areas of good practice reported by qualification verifiers**

The following good practice was reported during session 2018–19:

### **Servicing units**

- ◆ Effective standardisation across multiple campuses by appointing an Internal Verification coordinator and holding annual meetings of all assessors and internal verifiers.

### **Creative Industries units**

- ◆ F6V8 35 candidates given freedom to choose assessment topics to suit their personal strengths.
- ◆ Where candidate feedback is given verbally, recording feedback conversations and sharing the recordings with the learners.

### **FA1W12 and FA58 12 units**

- ◆ Preparing candidates well for higher education study by giving guidance on report writing using a model for HE reports produced by several universities.
- ◆ Using a learning journey blog to help candidates reflect on and develop knowledge and skills, and allow the assessor to provide an overview of learning and build a cohesive group ethos.

## **Specific areas for development**

The following areas for development were reported during session 2018–19:

### **Servicing units**

- ◆ Centres could identify a common approach to report formatting and referencing to be applied to all report assessments across all servicing units.
- ◆ Centres to cross-reference standardisation meetings for all Verification Group 1 Communication units to support non-subject specialists delivering Communication units in isolation.
- ◆ More robust tracking and monitoring of recommendations and required actions arising from external verifier reports.
- ◆ Ensuring candidates are not over-assessed with detailed Outcome 1 Reading questions on purpose and audience/target reader.
- ◆ Assessment checklists for Outcome 3 of H7MB 34 and H7TK 34 to be detailed with additional supporting evidence, eg candidates' notes.

### **Creative Industries units**

- ◆ Providing clear and unambiguous feedback, avoiding emotive language.
- ◆ Ensuring Graded Unit F6V8 35 media products at Stage 2 are only awarded 30 plus marks when final products which are close to professional standard.

**FA1W12 and FA58 12 units**

- ◆ Although the unit combination is recognised by some HE courses as having equivalence with Higher English, the assessment approaches are different. Past paper texts may be used, but questions and marking guidelines must be adapted and linked specifically to the performance criteria for the outcome being assessed.
- ◆ Audio or video recordings for Outcome 4 of FA1W 12 can be a useful resource for standardisation of assessment.
- ◆ A master folder with marking guidelines and exemplar student responses would provide a readily accessible source of advice for standardisation and when making assessment decisions.