Higher National and Vocational Qualifications Internal Assessment Report 2016
Construction Technician

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

It is quite clear from the external verification reports received this session that all centres have a clear and accurate understanding of the requirements of national standards relating to the HN suite of Built Environment qualifications.

Most centres are now delivering the updated HN qualifications that became 'live' in August 2014. Despite the obvious challenge of familiarisation and delivery of these 'new' programmes, there has been no perceived impact on quality and observation of national standards.

Unit specifications, instruments of assessment and exemplification materials

The Built Environment suite of HN qualifications in its current format has been delivered successfully for the past ten years. Most staff in centres are thoroughly familiar with the structure and content of the unit specifications, instruments of assessment, assessment support packs (ASPs) and earlier SQA-derived exemplar materials. Over this time, the staff in centres have produced a considerable catalogue of alternative instruments of assessment and exemplar materials that comprehensively meet the requirements of the unit specifications. This wealth of knowledge is being applied to the development of new assessment instruments to satisfy the requirements of the updated HN programmes.

As 'regionalisation' is consolidated in centres and campuses, some new assessors/ tutors have been appointed. Most centres have put in place robust guidance and support strategies for these new members of staff, mentored by more experienced staff, to ensure no loss of rigour and quality in the delivery of the qualifications.

Evidence requirements

It is quite obvious from external verification reports this session, that the staff in centres have clear and comprehensive understanding of the evidence requirements as defined in the unit specifications.

This is confirmed in the quality of alternative instruments of assessment that have been designed and successfully utilised by staff in the centres. There is further evidence in the number of prior verification applications which are deemed valid and reliable at review.

In addition, several centres were commended for the support, guidance and mentoring of newly-appointed tutors/assessors in order to promote standards of delivery and assessment.

Administration of assessments

Since 'regionalisation', most of our centres have now successfully integrated the variety of quality systems that used to exist in their constituent campuses. For a very small minority, systems review is ongoing. However, all centres have demonstrated robust systems that comprehensively support delivery of HN programmes.

Significant developments in IT portals have been observed in many centres. Not only do these portals support the administration of quality elements of the HN programmes, they also support all aspects of the delivery of the qualifications. These 'portals' also include areas accessible to learners where course information, learner progress, assessment planning and assessor feedback may be reviewed. It was also noted that a number of assessors were using e-mail and elements of social media to ensure learners were kept informed of progress and assessment opportunities.

Access to elements of these portals is offered to external verifiers where all records of assessment activity, learner progress, quality assurance and internal verification policies and procedures can be reviewed.

As mentioned earlier, the prior verification service for centre-devised assessment instruments is seeing an increase in applications. A small number of centres have made policy decisions that dictate that all centre-devised instruments of assessment will be submitted for prior verification review.

General feedback

Once again, it was observed that feedback to candidates was excellent. Many centres are using IT portals such as Moodle to update learners on all elements of assessment and progress. However, it was found that this facility, in many instances, supplemented oral and written feedback which was given at assessment review.

Once again, feedback generally, from all candidates interviewed, commended the support, guidance and professionalism demonstrated by tutors/assessors throughout the delivery of the various HN programmes. The accessibility of staff was praised, especially outwith programmed contact times. There was considerable support for e-mail and social media communications combined with the developing IT portals.

No barriers to assessment were observed, but, once again, assessment burden was mentioned. There was further praise for those centres using an IT portal. Clear assessment plans were widely published on the portals which had obviously been reviewed to reduce conflict and overburden. Integration of some of the elements of assessment was also observed in some of the centres.

Areas of good practice

The most significant elements of good practice highlighted this session were the further development and operation of IT learning portals in most centres. These portals not only considerably enhance the management and delivery of the HN suite of programmes, but also enhance the learning experience and encourage learner engagement with the process.

Many other examples of good practice were recorded as follows:

♦ Regular curriculum reviews with staff and student representatives

♦ Feedback to learners — valid, relevant and informative

♦ Incorporation of 'model making' into Architectural Design courses which, apart from adding skills, also promotes understanding of the relationships of design, technology and space

♦ The use of 'drones' to enhance delivery of certain surveying, drawing, technology and conservation elements of HN provision

Much of the 'good practice' that has been observed in past reviews is almost considered now as 'normal practice', but still features in EV reports when it is observed. However, special mention must be made of the initiatives noted this session concerning the integration of 'model making' to HN Architectural courses and the use of 'drones' to enhance the delivery of appropriate elements of the HN Built Environment programme. The commercial opportunities of this initiative to the industry are being investigated by the centre.

Specific areas for improvement

A few issues were identified in a very small minority of centres as follows:

♦ Lack of consistency in reporting and recording of feedback to learners

♦ Feedback to learners was not specific

♦ Alternative instruments of assessment not prepared for re-assessment purposes

♦ Standardisation activities not recorded adequately

Higher National graded units

Titles/levels of HN graded units verified:

H730	34	Construction Management Graded Unit 1
H732	34	Quantity Surveying Graded Unit 1
H72R	34	Built Environment Graded Unit 1
H73Y	34	Civil Engineering Graded Unit 1
H740	35	Civil Engineering Graded Unit 2
DX21	34	Construction Management Graded Unit 1
H72T	35	Quantity Surveying Graded Unit 2
H72S	34	Architectural Technology Graded Unit 1

General comments

It is quite clear, from the external verification reports received this session, that all centres have a clear and accurate understanding of the requirements of national standards relating to the HN suite of Built Environment qualifications and in particular, the graded units.

Through the medium of the Built Environment Qualifications Support Team (QST), many centres have taken opportunities to review and share best practice in terms of graded unit delivery and assessment. This has prompted some sharing of assessment materials and strategies among centres.

Unit specifications, instruments of assessment and exemplification materials

There is currently, within the sector, considerable knowledge and expertise among tutors and assessors of the complexities of delivery of graded units. With only one exception, all assessors are completely familiar with all aspects of graded unit delivery. Reference is made again to the array of splendid alternative instruments of assessment that has been devised by the staff in the centres. These centre-devised materials have similar structures to the SQA exemplar materials, but are innovative in their design and content, many relating directly to local and/or topical development proposals. In this way, the candidates are motivated and engage more readily with the graded unit processes.

Only one exception to the above commentary was observed. In one centre, the delivering assessor fell ill and was unable to complete assessment of the graded unit. The substitute assessor was unfamiliar with graded unit delivery and the support and guidance offered to him was inadequate. An action plan was issued at EV review and remedial action is ongoing at the time of writing.

Evidence requirements

Apart from the one exception already reported, it is abundantly obvious, from the quality of presentation observed in candidates' portfolios (and in centres' graduation shows), that all assessors and internal verifiers have a clear and

thorough understanding of evidence requirements laid out in the graded unit specifications.

Administration of assessments

Since 'regionalisation', most of our centres have now successfully integrated the variety of quality systems that used to exist in their constituent campuses. For a very small minority, systems review is ongoing. However, all centres have demonstrated robust systems that comprehensively support delivery of HN programmes.

Significant developments in IT portals have been observed in many centres. Not only do these portals support the administration of quality elements of the HN programmes, but also support all aspects of the delivery of the qualifications. These 'portals' also include areas accessible to learners where course information, learner progress, assessment planning and assessor feedback may be reviewed. It was also noted that a number of assessors were using e-mail and elements of social media to ensure learners were kept informed of progress and assessment opportunities. These communication strategies have been particularly effective in the successful delivery of graded unit achievements.

Access to elements of these portals is offered to external verifiers where all records of assessment activity, learner progress, quality assurance and internal verification policies and procedures can be reviewed.

As mentioned earlier, the prior verification service for centre-devised assessment instruments is seeing an increase in applications. A small number of centres have made policy decisions that dictate that all centre-devised instruments of assessment will be submitted for prior verification review.

General feedback

Once again, it was observed that feedback to candidates was excellent. Many centres are using IT portals such as Moodle to update learners on all elements of assessment and progress. However, it was found that this facility, in many instances, supplemented oral and written feedback which was given at assessment review.

Once again, feedback generally from all candidates interviewed, commended the support, guidance and professionalism demonstrated by tutors/assessors throughout the delivery of the various HN programmes. The accessibility of staff was praised, especially outwith programmed contact times. There was considerable support for e-mail and social media communications combined with the developing IT portals.

No barriers to assessment were observed, but, once again, assessment burden was mentioned. There was further praise for those centres using an IT portal. Clear assessment plans were widely published on the portals which had obviously been reviewed to reduce conflict and overburden. Integration of some of the elements of assessment was also observed in some of the centres.

Areas of good practice

The most significant elements of good practice highlighted this session were the further development and operation of IT learning portals in most centres. These portals not only considerably enhance the management and delivery of the HN suite of programmes, but also enhance the learning experience and encourage learner engagement with the process.

Many other examples of good practice were recorded as follows:

♦ Regular curriculum reviews with staff and student representatives
♦ Feedback to learners — valid, relevant and informative
♦ Incorporation of 'model making' into Architectural Design courses which, apart from adding skills, also promotes understanding of the relationships of design, technology and space
♦ The use of 'drones' to enhance delivery of certain surveying, drawing, technology and conservation elements of HN provision

Much of the 'good practice' that has been observed in past reviews is almost considered now as 'normal practice', but still features in EV reports when it is observed.

It is significant that there is considerable praise from candidates, assessors and internal and external verifiers for the contribution of the graded unit to integration of learning across all Built Environment programmes. The value is immeasurable, but can be seen in the quality of the candidates' portfolio presentations.

Specific areas for improvement

A few issues were identified in a very small minority of centres as follows:

♦ Lack of consistency in reporting and recording of feedback to learners
♦ Lack of controlled use of online materials in compilation of portfolios
♦ Alternative instruments of assessment not prepared
♦ Standardisation activities not recorded and documentation not available for audit purposes
♦ Lack of support/mentoring for new member of staff

SVQ awards

General comments

A considerable number of SVQ awards were reviewed this session. While the majority of these were at Level 3, there are increasing numbers of Level 4 and Level 5 awards being brought forward for external audit.

It is quite apparent that all staff throughout the sector have a thorough knowledge and clear and accurate understanding of the awards and the related National Occupational Standards.

Unit specifications, instruments of assessment and exemplification materials

There is considerable commentary within the external verifier reports that all assessors are familiar with the unit specifications. There is little in the way of SQA-prepared exemplification materials for the Construction Technician SVQ awards. However, much of the assessment activity takes place under observed conditions on the candidate's active construction site and assessors are highly experienced in the development and application of appropriate assessment instruments and strategies that meet the demands of the evidence requirements.

Evidence requirements

As indicated above, there is considerable evidence in EV reports that assessors and internal verifiers have comprehensive knowledge and clear understanding of the evidence requirements stated in the unit specifications.

Administration of assessments

Once again, it was found that each centre has a well-developed and robust administrative process in place to support all aspects of delivery and assessment of the SVQs. In all centres, there was a very strong observance of health and safety processes and activities as much of the assessment activity takes place on active construction sites.

All centres maintain regular contact with their candidates, nominally monthly. However, many assessors supplement these regular meetings with other communications by e-mail, mobile and other forms of social media. These methods have proved of considerable benefit to candidates who operate in remote areas and overseas. This brings its own challenges and some centres are now trialling the development and use of e-portfolios for appropriate candidates with a view to a more efficient and effective development and delivery vehicle.

There has also been an increase in the use of CD and DVD recording of professional discussions and observed work activities. Allied to narrative transcripts, these have proved very effective when indexed to evidence requirements in the management and verification of the awards.

General feedback

Generally, feedback to candidates has been very good. As assessment is carried out on an individual basis, the recording of feedback has been comprehensively documented in the candidates' portfolios. In all circumstances, the feedback was found to be constructive, relevant and supportive.

For the most part, feedback from candidates praised the assessors and the centres for their professionalism, accessibility, flexibility and the support and guidance offered by them.

There were no perceived barriers to access to assessment. It was obvious that assessment activity was encouraged and promoted by clear forward planning and advice, support and guidance offered to candidates.

Areas of good practice

Many of the areas of good practice that have been highlighted this session have been observed in several centres for a number of years and are now considered almost to be 'normal practice'. However, there is a (shrinking) minority of centres which are encouraged to adopt the good practice advice shared by the EVs during annual audit.

The considerable good practice which continues to be seen by external verifiers includes:

♦ Planning and implementation of targeted CPD activity
♦ Annual summary of CPD activity for each member of staff
♦ Excellent feedback to candidates, fully documented
♦ Internal verification annual report and summary — valuable document summarising internal verification activity and identifying good practice and action points/improvement opportunities for the following session
♦ Accessibility of assessors offering flexibility in assessment activity
♦ Sophisticated centre-devised documentation that facilitates management of assessment and internal verification activities
♦ The recording of professional discussions on CD and/or DVD is highly effective and provides a permanent, contemporary record of activity
♦ Refined indexing and cross-referencing of evidence systems to enhance effectiveness and transparency
♦ Exploration of e-portfolio developments to create a more efficient and effective delivery experience

Specific areas for improvement

As highlighted in previous reports, good practice observed in some centres can also prove to be challenging in others:

♦ Indexing and cross-referencing of evidence in some circumstances was ineffective in linking evidence to standards

- Indexing and cross-referencing of integrated knowledge and understanding evidence was inadequate
- CPD evidence targeted at the discipline was inadequate and occasionally, non-existent